

CHILDREN ON E: A QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE STUDY OF CHILDREN'S
RIGHTS ON THE E-TV NEWS AGENDA

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Assignment presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of
Philosophy (Journalism) University of Stellenbosch



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MARCH 2005

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this assignment is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature: _____

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ABSTRACT

Television is a powerful tool in the diffusion of information to the masses. It is therefore influential in the way society perceives and responds to children, and in so doing it has an influence on the provision and protection of children's rights.

According to international and locally conducted studies children are not high on the media agenda, are seldom given a voice or status, and if they are, issues around them are mostly formulated by adults.

This assignment sets out to determine whether the same conclusion can be drawn from South African free-to-air television station e-TV. In particular it seeks to establish whether e-News has been successful in placing children's rights in on the public agenda or whether it has reported on children in an ad hoc manner.

Children's human rights issues have been defined in accordance with the United Nation's Children's Rights Charter and the South African Bill of Rights, which makes specific provision for the child/children.

This assignment takes its lead from a Media Monitoring Project study. Like the MMP report this research is conducted within a human rights framework and concedes according to Section 28 (2) of the Constitution that "the child's best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child".

The methodology employed in this assignment, while replicating a Media Monitoring Project study, also employs discourse analysis in the form of interviews and questionnaires conducted with e-News members of staff. The methodology was applied to a sample of 71 stories which included reference to a child or children and which were broadcast on e-News Live at 7 and e-News live at 10 between January and August 2004.

In brief it was found that the rights to privacy, dignity and freedom of speech were satisfactorily upheld (as per the Bill of Rights), but that issues about children are mostly sourced by and commented on by adults. Furthermore it was found that children's rights do not form an implicit part of the e-News agenda.

Given that a human rights framework is normative for e-News, it is recommended that children's rights be placed in context, that stories challenge stereotypes about children and that e-News should consider appointing 'children's correspondents'.

(Key words: agenda, Bill of Rights, children, dignity, e-News, ethics, human rights, privacy, status, television, United Nations Children's Rights Charter)

ABSTRAK

Televisie is n' kragtige medium vir die verspreiding van inligting na die samelewing. Om hierdie rede speel televisie n' invloedryke rol op die manier waarop mense met kinders omgaan en dus het dit ook n' groot invloed op die voorsiening en berskering van kinderregte.

Volgens internasionale en plaaslike studies is kinders nie hoog op die media se agenda nie. Hulle word selde status verleen en indien wel, word kwessies wat hulle raak, dikwels deur volwassenes geformuleer.

Hierdie opdrag wil bepaal of hierdie gevolgtrekking ook spesifiek betrekking het op die televisiestasie, e-TV. Daar word spesifiek gefokus op e-News se agenda met betrekking tot kinderregte en of dit suksesvol genhandhaaf word of nie.

Kinderegte-kwessies is gedefinieer soos in die Verenigde Nasies se Handves van Kinderregte en die Suid-Afrikaanse Hanves van Menseregte wat spesifiek fokus op voorsiening vir kinders.

Hierdie opdrag is volg die voorbeeld van n' verslag van die Media Monitoring Project (MMP). Soos die MMP-verslag word hierdie navorsing binne n' menseregte-raamwerk gedoen en neem ook artikel 28 (2) van die Suid-Afrikaanse Grondwet in ag, wat stipuleer dat die kind se belange van kardinale belang is asook elke aspek wat die kind betrek.

Die metodologie wat in hierdie opdrag gebruik word, repliseer tegelykertyd die MMP-studie en maak gebruik van diskoersanalise in die vorm van onderhoude en vraelyste onder *e-News* personeellede. Hierdie metodologie maak gebruik van n' steekproef van 71 nuusstories wat verwys na n' kind/kinders wat tussen Januarie en Augustus 2004 op *e-News Live* om 19h00 uitgesaai is.

Ter opsomming is bevind dat privaatheidsregte, waardigheid en vryheid van spraak van kinders bevredigend benader is. Kwessies wat kinders aanraak word egter meer deur volwassenes aangespreek as deur kinders self.

Daar is egter ook bevind dat kinderregte nie n' integrale deel van *e-News* agenda vorm nie.

Gegewe dat n' menseregteraaamwerk by *e-News* toegepas word, word dit aanbeveel dat kinderregte binne konteks geplaas word en dat berigte sal streef daarna om stereotypes oor kinders te verander en dat *e-News* oorweeg om kinderkorrespndente aan te stel.

(sleutelwoorde: Agenda, e-News, etiek, Handves van Menseregte, kinders, Mensregte, privaatheid, status, televisie, Verenigde Nasies Handves van Kinderregte, waardigheid)

DEDICATION

This assignment is dedicated to my parents, Rod and Tonny Rutter who, with gentle love and support have helped me understand that knowledge is worthless without the wisdom to use it for the greater good.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This assignment would not have been possible without the much appreciated assistance of the following people: William Bird from the Media Monitoring Project for unconditionally sharing his expertise, research and contacts; The staff at the University of Stellenbosch Journalism Department for their professionalism and passion, in particular a special thank you to my supervisor, Dr Herman Wasserman, for his guidance, attention to detail and encouragement; Marleen Van Wyk who relentlessly and cheerfully pursued the articles, periodicals and references I needed to complete this assignment; the employees and management at e-TV who assisted with my field research. Last but not least a special thank you to my partner George Fourie, whose love and support during the time it took to complete this assignment was nothing short of heroic.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Rationale

Adolescents and youth make up about 60% of South Africa's population, which stands at more than 46.6 million people (Statistics South Africa 2004). Children therefore form a critical sub-set of the entire South African population. Even though they are subjected to high levels of discrimination, abuse, poverty, denial of education and disease such as HIV/AIDS, the coverage children receive in the media seems disproportionately low.

UNICEF warned in a report on 25 February 2004 that "children in developing and developed countries need urgent help to protect their rights and health". Such children, it went on to say, are some of the most marginalized in the world. "Lack of opportunity, cultural discrimination, inadequate social support, loss of land, or difficulty in integrating contribute to low self-esteem and loss of identity that can give rise to depression, alcohol and substance abuse, and suicide" (Bosch, 2004).

To underscore this a UNICEF-sponsored study in Buenos Aires, Montevideo and Santiago on student's perceptions of urban security issues is a good example of the media's powerful role in setting agendas and shaping opinions and images of youth. The study reflected that young people in these cities felt the media did not portray youth realistically or sympathetically. "Media – and television in particular – often present a negative and exaggerated picture of children as juvenile delinquents" (Gigli, 2004).

Children's voices, according to a document submitted to UNICEF by the International Federation of Journalists (June 1996) are not heard, especially by the rest of the community. A paper entitled "Prime time for children: media, ethics and reporting of commercial sexual exploitation", states that

The world of television's not like the real world. Its demography reflects its purposes: to produce audiences for advertisers. Looking at it through the prism of age reveals a population curves that, unlike the real world, but much like the curve of consumer spending, bulges in the middle years of life. That makes children and the elderly relatively neglected. (IFJ, 1996)

This impact of the free market is one aspect of prevailing currents of control of media and information sources. Another is the tendency of some governments and state authorities to manipulate information, usually through the tight state controls of broadcasting media, to meet political imperatives, which often do not reflect the considered needs and rights of sections of the population.

In several studies done in Africa, Kenyan researchers Emily Nwankwo and Arthur Okwemba conducted a study in October 2002 on how the Kenyan media covers children's right issues. They agree that children are often voiceless and under-reported. The reason for that, they say, is because children are not considered saleable commodities.

Furthermore, they add that

Most of the violations of children are rarely captured in the media. Where they are captured, it is in an ad hoc and reactive manner, rather than in a deliberate, focused and pro-active way" (Nwankwo & Okwemba; 2002; 5). "As agenda setters and agents of social change, as well as their power to influence policy, failure by the media to capture children's issues is indeed a grave shortcoming. (Nwankwo et al., 2002:5)

Nwankwo and Okwemba's study establishes and compares how the *Daily Nation*, *The East African Standard* and the *Kenya Times* newspapers cover children's rights issues between June 16, 2000 to June 16, 2001. It is based on the hypothesis that the coverage of children's issues in the media are passive rather than pro-active and are only done when children are victims of certain violent acts – an argument found to be valid for the South African media's coverage of children's rights in the MMP study of 2004.

In Swaziland, Crosbey Mwanza's research was conducted on Swazi newspapers over a three month period of July to September 2001 and was measured against studies in Lesotho, Kenya, Namibia, Botswana and South Africa. "The study was carried out to find how much the media takes seriously issues on children given the notion that children are future society leaders" (Mwanza, 2003:3).

Mwanza makes an interesting point. He found that children continue to be "underserved" in the media and believes that the "point of neglect by the media could be traced in cultural beliefs to which most media practitioners are socialized which tend to promote the belief that children have no standing in society" (Mwanza, 2003:4). Above all, Mwanza's research shows that more needs to be done by the media to reflect that children are valued.

Similar findings were made in Asia where Anura Goonasekera from the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre yielded similar results in his exhaustive research. The objectives of the study included an in-depth analysis of the reporting of major issues in television and newspapers concerning children in each of the 13 Asian countries selected for his study.

His project was a tie-in with the Second Asian Summit on “Child Rights and the Media and how it extends the scope on media participation in child development and the promotion of child rights, by defining the role of the media as “an educator, promoter, monitor and advocate of public interest.” His research was also a follow up on a 1997 study called “*Children in the News*” (Feilitzen, 2002).

Goonasekera also critically evaluated the policies and approaches of these media relating to children’s news; as well as examining the underlying basis of these policies and social, economic and ideological reasons that inform such policies. He examined to what extent policy makers and journalists are aware of children’s rights as enunciated by UNICEF and the extent to which this was identifiable in news stories.

His fieldwork began in 1999. Children were defined as persons under the age of 15, a group that comprised around 40 percent of the population. Goonasekera found that “the media are deeply implicated in patterns of discrimination operating against children in society. This happens mainly through silence and the neglect of child-related issues” (Feilitzen, 2002).

“The media have not consciously shunned the coverage of news pertaining to children,” says Goonasekera, “the media policy is to cover events considered newsworthy – in relation to readers/viewers, government policies and/or advertisers” (Feilitzen, 2002).

Australian researchers Chris Goddard and Bernadette Saunders, in a study for the National Child Protection Clearing House, asked the similar question: is the coverage of children’s issues about newsworthiness or about children as a commodity? By a commodity they are referring to whether stories about children generate enough audience attention to raise audience ratings and thus boost advertising revenue.

They argue that the power to define that lies within the media itself. Whereas they focus only on the role of the media in relation to child abuse and child protection, they argue that the media have been essential to the task of placing the problem of child abuse in the minds of the public and on the political agenda. “The media have played a major role in defining what is “normal” and what is “deviant” in society, thus contributing to definitions of what is, and what is

not, considered to be child abuse” (Goddard & Saunders, 2001). They go on to say that at times the media have appeared to have more influence on child protection policy and practice than professionals working in the field – a phenomenon described as “legislation by tabloid”.

The newsworthiness or lack of newsworthiness, for that matter, of children’s issues was underscored by Peter Almond in a research article submitted by the International Federation of Journalists for UNICEF (15 June 1996), when he is quoted as saying, “Children aren’t considered “hot topics” for the media, not unless children figure in a scandalous or heart-rending story or in some shocking data or statistics”.

The issue therefore is not so much about whether stories about children are newsworthy, but rather that they are newsworthy only in certain cases, generally of an extreme nature. This would suggest, therefore, that a children’s rights framework or contextualization is not on the agenda.

Although his paper focused on children, commercial sexual exploitation and the media and not specifically on the broader issues pertaining to children such as education, health and safety, it does raise some interesting points about the way in which media professionals conduct themselves when reporting on children. It states, as Goddard and Saunders found, that the media could without doubt influence decision-makers. But to do this effectively media professionals must choose how and when. “Time is critical... First, the reporter needs enough time to present the topic properly. Second, the story must be broadcast at a time when the people who ought to see it will see it. Finally, a sense of social timing is essential. Just as some entertainment shows will sell one year and not the next, so too will news stories; audiences are not static in their responsiveness to social issues” (IFJ, 1996: 21).

These initial studies have shown that whereas children do appear in the news, they appear to only be considered newsworthy in extreme cases. This may be because their stories then draw viewers and therefore revenue. To fill this niche broadcasters are failing to contextualize and individualize stories about children within a human rights framework. By objectifying children, the above research indicates that children suffer a loss of dignity, voice and status in the community of which they are part.

1.2. The South African Situation

Similar studies on the way in which children have been portrayed by the media have been done before in South Africa. In the past, children, according to the MMP, were mostly reported on in the context of horrifying evidence from court proceeding, when there was the involvement of some well known (adult) public figures, or in the case of a natural disaster, pain and suffering. This is even though children statistics show that children are the most vulnerable and largest sector of South African society (Statistics South Africa, 2004). In 2003 that there were more than 4000 reported crimes against children. In 2004 that rose to more than 6000 (Statistics South Africa). These figures, according to the South African Police Service, reflected only statutory crimes against children and do not include common law crimes, i.e. rape, indecent assault, abductions etc.

South African criminal justice research consultant Jean Redpath, highlights the increase of reported child sex abuse and the declining age of the average sexually abused child: The declining age of offenders is also of concern: she notes that Childline statistics show that 43% of all cases of sexual assault reported to Childline nationally are committed by children under 18 (Redpath, 2003).

Rape, indecent assault involving grievous bodily harm, and indecent assault of a person younger than 16 years, all fall under Schedule 3 of the Child Justice Bill. As of March 2001, 13 % (22 524) of all prisoners in South Africa were children under the age of 16 (Redpath; 2003).

South African is not alone in its battle to combat crimes against children. In 1995 it agreed that children's rights need to be upheld and protected and the first place for that to begin was in the media. At the First World Summit On Children and Television in Melbourne, Australia it was agreed that children's issues were under-reported. It was there that Children's Broadcasting Foundation proposed and submitted the 'International Children and Television Charter'.

The African delegation, under the leadership of Dr Ivy Matsepe-Casaburri, refused to endorse the Charter, as did Asia. South Africa invited a meeting with Child Rights stakeholders to discuss and amend the charter "to take special cognizance of South Africa's particular television environment". This was because at that time, crimes against children were increasing dramatically.

The Southern African Broadcasting Association (SABA) and Union of African Radio and Television (URTNA) ratified the amendments. A year later yielded the Southern Africa Charter

on Children & Television, and then in 1997 the All Africa Charter on Children & Broadcasting was passed.

Of importance is that the Charters were all amended within a human rights framework. According to South Africa's Bill of Rights (1996), among other points, it states in section 28.2 that "a child's best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child". The Bill of Rights applies to all law and binds legislature. It ensures the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom are enshrined. But above all because the Bill of Rights applies to all law and binds legislature, it ensures accountability if those rights are breached.

This offers a contextual framework for the media. It makes the ethics by which the media should be governed measurable. This means that the ethical parameters within which the media operates give a very clear indication of when a right has been broken or upheld. It is up to the governing bodies to ensure the media is accountable when it breaches these ethics. Legally, for example, the law will be binding if the media discloses the identity of a child in a high-risk situation, because the court is the higher guardian of all minors.

However, even though these rights are in place and they are legally binding, they are also bound by the ethics of a media organization. While children do, in theory, have rights, in previous research (1996) the MMP found that children are still often only represented as victims in the media and their voices or opinions go unheard.

It stated that there is a point where a child-victim may suffer secondary abuse when their details are exposed. In addition, the MMP found that children are often represented in a manner that negatively impacts on their rights to dignity and privacy.

Another problem identified by the MMP exists in determining how the media should handle sensitive information. The media's responsibility lies in keeping the balance between the rights of the public to be informed and the rights of the child, particularly if he/she is engaged in criminal activities or are victims of criminal activity.

This research on e-News will replicate the methodology used by the Media Monitoring Project by applying it to e-News. In 2004 UNICEF commissioned a project to be researched by the MMP, which looks at how children are represented in the South African Media. The project, called "*Empowering Children and Media*" and its methodology will be replicated in this study. It will form "a baseline study that will enable the development of policies and strategies to address strengths and weaknesses in the coverage of children, as well as further the development

of a human rights culture in the media, through training and advocacy principles” (MMP, 2004:3).

The MMP’s project ran from March to May 2003. During this time approximately 22 000 news items from 36 media, including e-News, were monitored, analyzed and entered into a database. Every item or image, which contained a reference to a child or children, was monitored and subjects were recorded to determine the percentage of child stories in relation to other stories.

In addition to the monitoring by adult MMP researchers, groups of children conducted a two-week monitoring project of their own, based on the same methodology used by the researchers.

The outcome of the research was that “the media’s influence and reach would enable the communication of messages that is empowering to children and would facilitate greater awareness of children and children’s rights to both adults and children” (MMP, 2004:71).

The report also found that the media does play an important role in challenging stereotypes and assumptions about children, their role in society and perceptions of themselves. The MMP found that girls are largely represented in stories about abuse, while boys are largely represented in stories about sport.

It concluded that while the media’s role in highlighting various issues in relation to children must be acknowledged, it is important that the media continue to raise awareness about children and children’s rights.

1.3 The Research Problem

From studies done elsewhere, it seems that children are not high on the media’s agenda and if they are, issues around them are formulated by adults. Television is a powerful tool in the diffusion of information to the masses. Therefore, according the human rights of dignity, equality and fairness the media is empowered to change the way children are perceived and dealt with by society, and in so doing influencing the provision and protection of children’s rights.

The problem with the MMP’s study is that it is too small and not specific enough. This research will attempt to establish whether the problems, which presented themselves in international and local studies on the coverage of children, manifest in e-News content. This

research will look at how e-News reports on children and whether the rights of children are upheld in the reports.

The problem will be addressed by questioning the content of each 19h00 bulletin from January to August 2004 to determine how many stories about children appeared in the bulletin, whether the rights to privacy, dignity and freedom of speech were upheld (as per the Bill of Rights), and whether children explicitly or specifically form part of the e-News agenda.

1.4 Guidelines and Policies

Before the methodology for this research is discussed, it is important to look at the human rights framework within which journalists work and the ones within which e-News operates. There are numerous policies, acts and laws in South Africa from which journalists can draw on. Of specific importance for this study are the parameters within which e-News staff work.

In its draft Editorial Guidelines, e-TV states the following:

The consent of parents or legal guardians must be obtained before interviewing children, or involving them in your report. Children are generally keen to appear on camera, but may lack the necessary judgment about what is in their own long-term interest. Therefore, when reporting on children, careful consideration should be given to how it is carried out, and any possible impact the report may have when broadcast.

When dealing with traumatized children, for example, it is advisable to seek expert advice about is or is not appropriate. The same applies when reporting on dangerous or illegal activity among children, such as drug taking or prostitution. Avoid taking identifiable pictures of children with terminal illnesses if you have not obtained permission from parents or guardians. Do not take pictures of children involved in illegal activity of victims of sexual abuse.

Interviews with children also require particular care as they can be easily led in questioning. Children should be allowed to speak for themselves and not prompted into giving the short of answer you are looking for. (Nicklin, 2004)

Children under the age of 18 years are among the most vulnerable members of society and are therefore afforded special protection under the law. The Constitution and Bill of Rights, as well

as a body of policy and law such as the childcare act (74 of 1983), the Criminal Procedures Act (51 of 1977), and the South African Children's Rights Charter ensure that the rights of minor's are protected. More recently the Office of the Presidency and the Office of the Status of the Child also released a set of guidelines addressing the media's representation of children.

Section 28 (2) of the Constitution states that "the child's best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child". The Child Care Act stipulates that:

- No person shall publish information relating to children's court proceedings
- The identity of the child involved shall not be revealed
- Publicity should serve the best interest of the child
- Information provided should be approved by the minister or commissioner.
- The Criminal Procedure Act section 154 (3) stipulates "No person shall publish in any manner whatever information which reveals or may reveal the identity of the accused under the age of 18 year or of a witness at criminal proceeding who is under the age of 18".

Globally there are a number of governance institutions affiliated to the United Nations that have developed binding international agreements on children's rights, the most prominent of which is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which South Africa signed in 1995.

African governments are also signatories to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the African child. In addition, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and UNICEF have formulated ethical guidelines that provide principles for reporting on issues involving children.

The UNCRC states that: "... state parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination..." (Article 2) and that "...the best interests of the child shall be primary consideration ..." (Article 3). The Convention also provides for the rights of children to assert their own views freely (Article 12) and enshrines children's rights to freedom of expression (Article 13). Article 16 states that "... the child shall be protected from unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attack on his or her honour and reputation ..."

The UNCRC specifically sets out the responsibilities of the media, saying “parties recognize the important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from diverse and national and international sources ...” (Article 17). Furthermore in this article 17 (e) the Convention, “states that parties shall encourage the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well being...” Article 40 “... states that parties recognize the right of every child alleges as, accused of or recognized as having infringed the penal law to be treated in a manner consistent with the promotion of the child’s sense of dignity and worth...”

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child also recognized the need to take appropriate measures to promote and protect the rights and welfare of the African child. The charter notes with concern that the situation with most African children, remains critical due to the unique factors of their socio-economic, traditional, cultural and developmental circumstances, natural disasters, armed conflict, exploitation and hinder and therefore requires special safeguards and care. Furthermore the Charter re-iterates the principles of non-discrimination, the best interests of the child and survival and development embodied in the UNCRC and expounds on various other principles important to ensuring the protection of the child.

The International Federation of Journalist (IFJ) also adopted a set of guidelines and principles for reporting on issues of children. The guidelines state that journalists and the media shall strive to maintain the highest standards of ethical conduct in reporting children’s affairs by providing information that is accurate and sensitive. The IFJ advocates the careful use of language and images to avoid intrusion and avoid information, which may be damaging, avoiding stereotypes and sensationalism.

In conclusion these guidelines demonstrate that the rights of children are protected in principle. Each of the above organizations, Charters, Bills and guidelines offers a firm ethical baseline from which to formulate a norm. It ensures that children’s rights are measurable. However, the cleft between upholding and breaking children’s rights still exists. This raises the questions about whether media organizations, such as e-News, are being monitored and whether they are accountable if they contravene the above. It also raises the question whether journalists are educated enough in the rights of children to recognize when the child’s rights are breached.

Before that is analyzed, it is important to detail the research methodology used to determine whether the rights of children form part of the agenda on e-News.

Chapter 2

Research Methodology

The research question posed is whether e-News reports on and broadcasts stories (between and including January and August 2004) about children which violates part 1, Article 2 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Act which states “Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all discrimination or punishment on the basis of status, activities, expressed opinions or beliefs of child’s parents, legal guardians or family members” (UN, 1990).

“A Child”, as defined by the Convention and the South African Bill of Rights, means “every human being below the age of eighteen years unless the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier” (CVC: Part 1, Article 1: 2)

To prove whether e-News violates Part 1, Article 2 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the child, this qualitative (what) and qualitative (how and why) study analyzes a sample of 71 stories from e-News’ 19h00 and 22h00 news bulletins between January and August 2004.

The MMP (Media Monitoring Project) “*Empowering Children & Media*” report monitored and analyzed 22 000 items from 36 different media, including print, radio and television. From March to May 2003 any item or image, which contained a reference to a child or children, was recorded to determine the percentage of child stories relative to other stories in the media over the monitoring period. The project was largely quantitative.

The project did contain a qualitative element with the participation of children. Diverse groups of children from Eastern Cape, Gauteng and KwaZulu Natal were encouraged to express their views on reports relating to them. But the outcome of this is to be published in a separate report.

However, The MMP’s methodology has come against a heavy groundswell of criticism, according to Prosper Luthuli (2004:44). Luthuli argues for the incorporation of interviews/ethnography in the MMP methodology. He argues that a text-oriented discourse analysis is limited and that a “combined use of analytical instruments such as ethnography and reception analysis with text-orientated discourse analysis is more likely to yield a superior analysis than the latter used in isolation” (Luthuli, 2004:44). Luthuli adds that among the

shortcomings of TODA (text analysis and discourse analysis) is that the study of the text is not placed in context. He advocates critical discourse analysis combined with TODA, extant critical theory, and empirical analysis is one of the best routes for a researcher to take.

The methodology employed in this assignment, while replicating the MMP study, will also attempt to employ both TODA and discourse analysis in the form of interviews and questionnaires conducted with e-News members of staff.

Like the MMP report this research is done within a human rights framework and concedes, according to Section 28 (2) of the Constitution that “the child’s best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child”. Similarly, this research works from the premise that “the discourse of news is generally negative ...” That the media, by virtue of its power and influence, has an ability to direct and attract attention to societal problems such as societal problems and issues, such as children and children’s rights” (MMP, 2004: 6)

By “Analysis” is meant the detailed examination of the elements, which make up each of the 71 stories. It is two-pronged. Firstly, through quantitative means it is to establish what percentage of coverage was given to children in the following categories; the percentage of stories about children and what the themes of those stories were; a breakdown of the roles of children in news (orphan, street child, sick child etc.); the percentage of children sourced for their opinions; the age, sex, and race of children in the news. (When monitoring for the racial representation of children, racial categories of black, white, coloured and Indian were used). There were included in the methodology because they are still used to measure racial representation and continue to apply in post-apartheid government policies.

The qualitative side of this assignment will analyze and discuss the following criteria. These criteria were chosen to help determine a pattern in the way in which stories about children are used in a bulletin. It is an attempt to determine whether stories about children are on the e-News agenda. Later this assignment will discuss how and why:

- the item was placed in the bulletin
- a choice was made on the type of report, according to the various sections of news such as hard news, business, sport or human interest
- the item raised an issue pertaining to children. While categories determine the central subject of an item there are usually a number of other issues that are likely to be raised by an article.

- the child or children are typecast in a specific role
- sources were identified. Different categories were developed for adults and children. Adult sources were captured when they were quoted either directly or indirectly in the item of where they appeared in an image with children. For adults, their professional or personal indicator was captured (e.g. mother, police, teacher) as well as their sex to determine the type of person who speaks on behalf of children and whether there is a gender bias. Children were also regarded as sources and whether or not they were accessed for their opinions in order to determine what percentage of children were given the opportunity to express their opinions.
- the news report was valued. The report was categorized as positive, negative, fair/neutral in relation to whether or not the news report communicated good or bad news. While it is the nature of news to generally focus on bad news events, these can be covered in ways that are not necessarily negative. For example, while a journalist could cover a story of a child abuse case. The news organization could also place the story in context by stating that child abuse figures have decreased by a certain percentage or link it to the arrest of a suspected pedophile or explain how the children's courts are going a long way toward dealing with the perpetrators. When the report was neither negative nor positive it was regarded as fair/neutral. Each story was thus monitored using standardized criteria to determine the overall slant of the item.

The second leg of the analysis will focus on the decision-making process (i.e. the 'gate-keeping') of a child-related story in the news bulletins. This is about who makes the decisions and why they make the decisions they do.

To ascertain this, an in-depth questionnaire was completed by 1) those in news management positions (to gain insight into their agendas, if any). These people included the Head of News, News Editors, Bulletin writers and Assignment Editors 2) those who carry out the decisions of news management (i.e. reporters and writers). From this it will be possible to deduce *why* children are covered in a positive, negative or neutral light.

2.1 Agenda Setting

McCombs and Shaw first reported the agenda-setting hypothesis in 1968 (Severin & Tankard, 1988:265). After studying the presidential campaign of that year, they concluded that it was the mass media that set the agenda, thus influencing the attitudes of the populace toward political issues. Their study focuses on “undecideds” because they would be most susceptible to agenda-setting effects. The researchers interviewed a sample of 100 respondents and simultaneously conducted a content analysis of the mass media focusing on those voters – five newspapers, two magazines and two television evening newscasts.

The sample of people was asked to indicate what they perceived to be the main issues in the country. Their answers were coded into 15 categories. The findings supported the agenda-setting effect. The authors pointed out “the data suggest a very strong relationship between the emphasis placed on different campaign issues by the media and the judgments of voters as to the salience and importance of campaign topics” (Severin et al, 1988:266).

Kurt Lang and Gladys Engel Lang later defined these findings as

The mass media force attention to certain issues. They build up public images of political figures. They are constantly presenting objects suggesting what individuals in the mass media should think about, know about, have feelings about (Lang et al. cited by Severin et al, 1988:266)

Bernard Cohen had this to say about the power of the press:

It may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think *about* (Cohen as cited by Severin et al, 1988:266).

Agenda-setting came about when researchers became dissatisfied with the dominant theoretical position in mass communication research during the 1950's and 60's – the limited effects model. Joseph Klapper stated this model well when he wrote:

Mass communication ordinarily does not serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effects, but rather functions among and through the nexus of mediating factors and influences (Klapper as cited by Severin, 1988:267).

Researchers were beginning to shift their focus from looking at how the media effected the perceptions of people (their views of the world), rather than changing their attitudes.

At the same time that this change of thinking was taking place, the world of psychology was undergoing a change. Cognitive psychology was taking on appeal as opposed to behaviorism. Behaviourism was based largely on conditioning in shaping behavior while cognitive psychology viewed men and women as “problem solvers” rather than objects of conditioning or manipulation. This field of psychology was focused on the ‘representations’ of the world people build in their heads and how they go about building them” (Neisser as cited by Severin et al, 1988:267).

The agenda-setting hypothesis and cognitive psychology work hand-in-glove by investigating the importance that people assign to certain issues and how they are arrived at.

The mass media, according to McCombs and Shaw (1988:269) presents a very uniform set of issues before the public.

In one sense the media only record the past and reflect a version of the present but, in doing so, they can affect the future, hence the significance of the “agenda” analogy.

The agenda-setting function of the media stipulates that the relevant frequency of references to given political issues in media content will be reflected in a corresponding set of issue priorities in the minds of readers viewers and listeners” (McCombs & Shaw as cited by Curran, Gurevitch & Woolecott, 1977:272).

Agenda-setting is one of the theories that has survived over many years in the media and has held that the mass simply by paying attention to some issues and neglecting others will have an effect on public opinion (McQuail & Windhall, 1981:62). “People will tend to know about those things which the mass media deal with and adopt the order of priority assigned to different issues”.

This research will examine this theory in relation to the way in which e-News covers child-related issues. It will find out that e-news has an agenda in terms of what and how it chooses to cover child-related stories and what or who influences the decision-makers. The theory is that if an audience can be convinced that children’s rights are important, awareness will be created which will facilitate the changes needed to respect the rights of and empower the child.

Of course, as McQuail and Windahl state, one of the pitfalls of this theory is that it is not always clear whether a national agenda affects the media, or whether it is affected by interpersonal or even personal influences.

There is also uncertainty, according to McQuail and Windahl (1981:63), on whether agenda-setting is initiated by the media or by the members of the public. Is it a response to people's needs or a need the media feels the public should respond to? This is relevant to this assignment on e-news because it will help determine whether the public determines the nature and frequency of children right's stories on the news or whether e-News places children's rights stories on the public agenda.

The critics of broadcasting see their power as lying in controlling the agenda "in their ability to select certain issues for discussion and decision and to ignore others, or to treat them as non-existent; and in their ability to treat certain conflicts of interest as manifestly proper material and others too complex, or marginal or unmanageable" (Curran, Gurevitch & Woollacott, 1977:60). The greatest constraint lies, according to these authors, in the conventions of what is called 'news-tasting' – the job in the case of e-news of the Assignments Editor. It is his/her decision to filter through the news, which comes into the newsroom. This may be more of a handicap for the children's story 'cause' than either visual or technical constraints.

This process is also called 'gate-keeping', and is a concept, which originated from Kurt Lewin (1947). He noted that information always has to flow through certain channels which contain 'gate areas', where decisions are made "either according to impartial rules or personally by the 'gatekeeper', as to whether information or goods will be allowed to enter in or continue in the channel" (Lewin as cited by McQuail et al, 1981:100).

According to McQuail (1981:100) the weakness with the gatekeeper model is that it lends itself to a subjective interpretation of the activity being studied. It also suggests that there is only one gate area and it is a rather passive activity as far as the flow of news is concerned.

In a statement of Program Activity Regulation of the Finnish Broadcasting Company, the following is described as the agenda of a newsroom:

The Broadcasting Company should not aim in implementing some particular worldview in its audience, but rather at making available the building blocks necessary in the construction of a personal worldview. An important part of the Broadcasting Company's activity is the transmission of news and coverage of both cultural and social events" (Robinson & Levy, 1986: 22).

This definition encapsulates a relevance to the South African context. Building blocks for e-News should be the individual story pertaining to children's rights within a greater social context, rather than following a stereotypical worldview of how children are perceived. Within an agenda-setting context the research will then be able to determine whether perceptions about children rather than attitudes about children are influenced.

This research will determine who at e-TV sets the agenda on the coverage of children's issues. This is going to be done by analyzing the questionnaires completed by key decision-makers on their views on children's issues. Taking this one step further it is important to keep in mind the demands imposed by e-News owners (Midi TV – a black empowerment consortium), profitability, public relations agencies and other important “gatekeepers” in the news game. It is important who establishes the agenda when it comes to coverage of children's stories – the public, the government, PR companies, NGO's, children or individual news people.

While this is all relevant, it would be prudent to keep in mind, as Severin and Tankard state that “the evidence on agenda-setting may not be conclusive, but there has been enough supporting evidence to suggest that the concept should be taken seriously” (1988:283). Agenda-setting does raise important questions of responsibility for the journalist and news crew. It also suggests opportunities, because if the media does not cover significant happenings in proportion to their importance this means there are still crucial news stories to be covered (Severin & Tankard, 1988:283).

Furthermore, Tannis Macbeth states that most researchers, especially those that study human development, believe that children are a “special audience” for television but that adults set their news agenda (1996:4):

Increasingly, it seems many citizens have come to the conclusion that the media are making available ideas and practices that are at odds with the very values that they would wish the society to uphold ... such media excesses are both initiated and encouraged by the commercial underpinning of media production and the delivery systems we have adopted” (Mabeth, 1996:250).

This becomes relevant to e-news when children's rights are jeopardized a commercial value. Audience ratings determine advertising and a news format are designed around brining in viewers. Therefore a children's story has to be “attractive” to the audience, as perceived by adults. For children this means that their status as a valued member of society is of little consequence unless their circumstance is “quirky”, “freaky” or “dramatic” enough to become

newsworthy for a station. The question is: what is it worth to carry children's stories which uphold their human rights, contextualize and veer away from type-casting?

Researcher C. Bourne answers this question. His research into the BBC's children's news programme called *Newsround* (cited in Lohr & Meyer, 1999:186) indicates that children's rights can be on the news agenda and simultaneously be of commercial value. Furthermore, he argues that children can determine their own right's agenda and still attract revenue.

The objective of *Newsround* was to relate to children's interests with the possibility of developing a political awareness in keeping with the children's processing abilities. An important finding of the study is that the established patterns of adults' news are very emphatically gaining the upper hand in children's news and thus many educational and didactic intentions with which the producers first approached children's news came to nothing. This means, according to the Bourne, that children's news often brings nothing but information for adults that has been trimmed in length, "the only difference then seems to be that in news for adults an insecure and dangerous world full of problems is presented, but in children's news it is more likely to be a hopeful, more secure world that respects human life" (Bourne cited in Lohr & Meyer, 1999:186).

John Westergaard agrees, but looks at it from a different angle. He believes that the image the media portrays of a sector of society, such as children for example, is not totally false, but it is a caricature, which sacrifices the diverse and ambiguous reality of popular outlooks in the world. He states that the media present, "a picture of 'mass' opinion and taste which singles out only the safe 'common denominators' of orientation that square with the practical order of things as they are" (Westergaard cited by Curran, Gurevitch & Woolacott, 1977:108). This means that little effort is made to "think out of the box" when it comes to relating children stories.

Researchers agree that the media help to establish an order of priorities in society about its problems and objectives. They do this, not by initiating or determining, but by broadcasting according to a broad scale of values, which are determined elsewhere, normally in the political system (McQuail cited by Curran, Gurevitch & Woolacott: 1977:84).

This agenda-setting formulation is linked to my central question because it will help determine if the rights of the child are being neglected on e-News. The Agenda-setting theory will help test whether children's stories are considered lacking in newsworthiness; considered

over-reported issues; or because they are being filtered out of the newsroom ‘inbox’ because of political or person agendas.

The reason agenda-setting forms part of this research is because it raises important questions about responsibility. The labels that journalists apply to children, for example, can have an important influence on whether the public pays attention to the issues connected with the event. The findings of agenda-setting suggest opportunities. If certain events are not covered according to their importance, there are probably crucial stories waiting to be uncovered.

2.2 Operational Definition

The United Nations Charter on CRC emphasizes taking the best interest of the child in any decision on any matter relating to them. It seeks to protect Children’s rights and any issues pertaining to them. According to the CRC, children have a right to the following:

- Education,
- Protection from child labour,
- Protection from violence and abuse,
- Health and protection from HIV/AIDS,
- Freedom of expression, legal rights;
- Protection from war and conflict (Nwankwo et al, 2002:15)

The negation of these rights constitutes abuse of child rights, which forms the core of this study. Each news story on e-TV between January and August 2004, which contained a reference to child/children was categorized according to the above rights.

By posing the above questions this research aimed to establish

- 1) What the trends in e-News are with regards to the covering of children’s stories
- 2) Whether e-News has taken all the appropriate measures to ensure that the child is
Protected against all discrimination or punishment on the basis of status, activities.
- 3) Whether the expressed opinions or beliefs of the child’s parents, legal guardians or
family members or the child itself were in the best interests of the child

2.3 Limitations

There are some limitations to this study as the inferences made are based on a sample from a selected time frame, January to August 2004. During this same period there were a number of non-child related news items, which were vying for attention. The sample period coincided with the War in Iraq, and South Africa's celebration of ten years of democracy as well as the country's second general election. These may have somewhat elevated children's rights as a newsworthy issue, for example. They may have resulted in a significant increase in the number of reports on or about children.

There were other news items such as the Hefer Commission of Inquiry and the debacle surrounding the arrest of Judge Siraj Desai in India on rape charges, which may have detracted from the coverage of children's issues.

It cannot be confirmed whether samples from other time frames would yield similar results and there is thus scope for further research. But the aim is to inter alia find out who the gatekeepers are and this will remain the same.

Furthermore, as e-News is an English-based medium, this research excludes any other of the 11 official languages, which could attract a different audience that is Afrikaans, Zulu, Xhosa etc. This does not rule out the assumption that audience with a first language other than English would still tune into e-News. The study also excludes other forms of media such as print and radio and the Internet.

The program "Morning Edition", current affairs programmes such as *3rd Degree* and *Judge for Yourself* as well as the 18h15 News Update were also excluded from this assignment. The inclusion of these programmes could change the result and future research might include these programmes in its analysis. The results of this research will have a knock-on effect on these programmes and an analysis of these programmes, which have a news-driven agenda could change the results yielded from this research. One could find, for example that more attention is given to child-related issues in these programmes than in the news.

The above may explain why the sample is relatively small (71) over an eight-month period. While the content has not yet been established (that will follow in chapter 3), this research will attempt to find out whether children's stories form part of the e-News agenda-setting. The content of the stories which e-News covered over this period, appear too largely driven by international news and high-profile individuals (politicians, judges and celebrities). This assignment will ascertain whether or not, for example, children's rights formed part of the

national election agenda and might therefore have or have not received coverage over that period of time. It would appear that the only time when stories of children are reported on is when there is isolated tragedy and crime (rape, abuse) and Children's Day or Child Protection Week.

2.4 Putting the monitoring into perspective

The spread of children's items over the eight-month monitoring period indicates that children feature prominently at some times and less prominently at other. Identifying some of the key events that occurred during the monitoring period helps to contextualize the monitoring and explain some of the key research findings.

2.4.1 Key events that occurred on e-News

- E-News covered a number of events live. Most of them were politically related. 2004 showed an increased focus on hearings and court cases into high-profile political figures. For example the national elections, the celebration of ten years of democracy, the court case of Judge Seraj Desai and arms deal debacle surrounding Deputy President Jacob Zuma and businessman Shabir Shaik.
- Court cases were covered and the ones, which raised the most controversy, were the stories of the Sizzlers gay massage parlour massacre in February and the court case of Armien Andrews charged with child abduction and prostitution.
- In March 70 alleged mercenaries were charged in Zimbabwe with attempts to overthrow the government in Equatorial Guinea. In the same month human rights lawyer and politician Dullah Omar died.
- Another high-profile story, which received extensive coverage, was the visit of actress Charlize Theron to South Africa after she won an Oscar in Hollywood.
- Judge Seraj Desai was arrested on a charge of rape in India in April, which was later, dropped. General elections were also held in April in, which the ruling ANC won a landslide victory, picking up just over 70% of the vote. President Thabo Mbeki was sworn in for a second term and Inkatha Freedom Party leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi was dropped from Mbeki's cabinet. Also in April were South Africa's celebrations of ten years of democracy, which received extensive coverage.

- Child Protection week ran from the 24 of May. On the political front deposed President Jean Bertrand Aristide arrived with his family in May seeking refuge from war-torn Haiti. It was the same month that South African singer Brenda Fassie died and that Springbok “Vleis” Visagie shot and killed his daughter after allegedly mistaking her for a car thief. The announcement of South Africa as the World Cup hosts was also prominently covered in May, as was the participation of South Africa’s athletes in the Olympics in Athens in September. South Africa walked away with several gold medals.
- Hefer Commission of Inquiry into arms deals irregularities between Deputy President Jacob Zuma and Shabir Shaik. The Public Prosecutor Bulelani Ngcuka who brought the charges against them later resigned in July. 23 MP’s from three political parties were placed under investigation over allegations of false travel expenses.
- Former UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s son, Mark, was arrested for alleged involvement in supplying arms to Equatorial Guinea to aid a coup-attempt in August.

2.4.2 Coverage of items relating to children

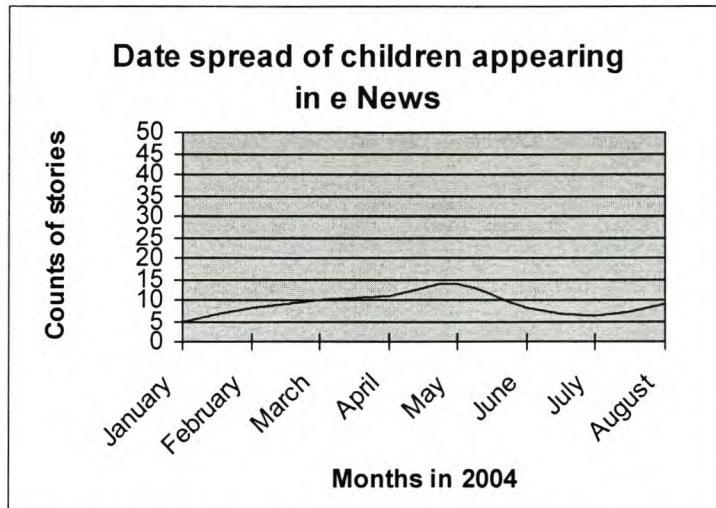
As mentioned earlier, Child Protection week ran from the 24 – 31 May. During e-news bulletins at this time it is possible, according to Graph 1 this graph, to see a slight increase in the number of stories about children.

According to the MMP it is normal to see “fluctuations in the number of children’s stories over time, but it is valuable to note when there are peaks and troughs. Many of the lower points, with fewer children’s stories fell over the weekends” (2004:14).

This is expected as the bulletins are often shorter and fewer over the weekend. With regards to the agenda-setting theory, Child Protection week, for example could be a time when e-News specifically places children on the agenda. There was also an increase in child-related stories in March and April. This was around the time of the elections and could well have been part of the political agenda. At this time it was also

South Africa's ten years of democracy. A look back over the past ten years and a forecast could have included stories about children's rights.

Graph 1. Date spread of children appearing in e-News



2.4.3 Prominent children's News

Child Protection week in May received a whole lot of coverage (14 stories) and appeared to have captured the media's attention. There was also a steady build-up towards Child Protection week in March (10) and April (11). (Refer to Graph 1.)

While the overall coverage of children is low, as revealed in this report there were instances where children were almost entirely absent from the news agenda. A complete drop in children's stories occurred around January (5).

To understand this better it is worth taking a look at certain theories about news values. Sociologist Herbert J. Gans argues that "the news does not limit itself to reality judgments; it also contains values, or preference statements" (Gans as cited in Severin & Tankard; 1988:228).

Underlying news on e is a picture of the nation and society, as the media believes it should be. These values are, as Gans states, rarely explicit. Gans says they are found in many different stories over a long period of time. "Often they help define news and affect what activities

become news” (Gans as cited in Severin & Tankard; 1988:229). This will be discussed further and in more detail in Chapter 3 Analysis).

With reference to graph 1, news values are at play. Values are a collection of beliefs that provide us with a fundamental position on an issue. In the context of agenda-setting, these are not necessarily the cognitive effects of communication. However, they are the ones that may particularly interact with the nature of the audience and the social system.

By applying the agenda-setting methodology we may be able to determine the difference between the coverage of children’s stories over Child Protection week as compared with the rest of the time analyzed, where it has to be determine whether children’s issues are part of the e-News value system.

Therefore, this graph suggests that given the apparent isolated coverage of child-related issues there may be an ambiguity about children’s human rights issues with viewers that is not resolved. Attitudes towards child-related issues may not be formulated, a belief system may be non-existent perpetuating the belief that if the news does not see child-related issues as worthy enough.

The apparent scarcity of information about children’s rights allows for ambiguity and therefore conflicts with information the audience already has. This assignment will determine, whether e-News gatekeepers are aware of the affective consequences, i.e. the desensitization about children’s rights, whether fear and anxiety about children’s rights are increased or decreased, and whether a change of reporting could lead to a change of morale in society.

Chapter 3

Analysis

3.1 Focus areas

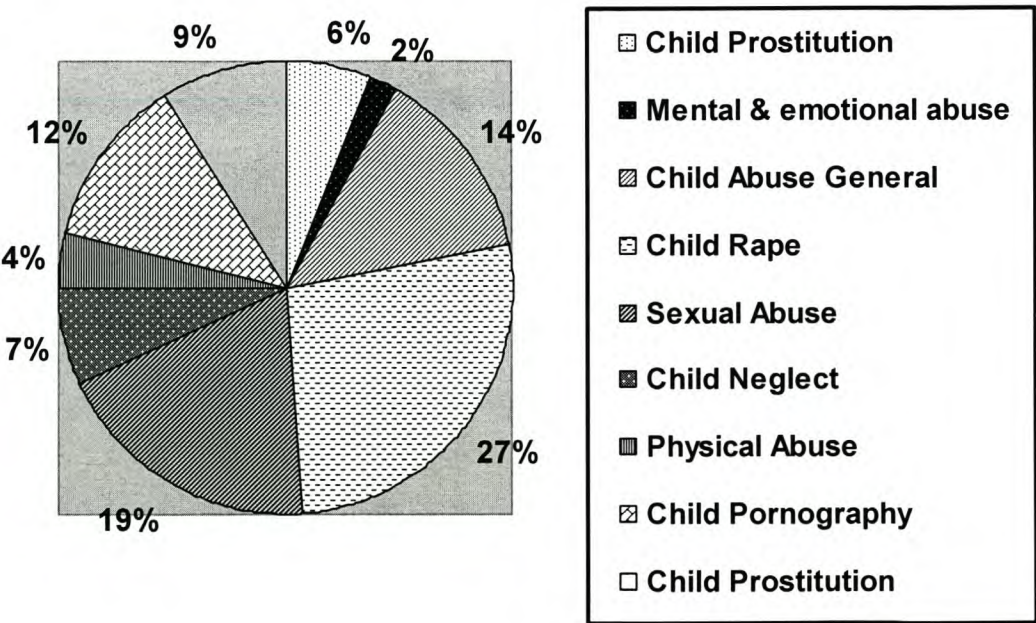
3.1.1 Raising Awareness or Sensationalizing: A double-edged media sword

The important role which e-News can play in raising public awareness of the abuse of children, and in combating all forms of criminal and sexual exploitation can be expected. But the issue is not as clear cut as many would like; media coverage can shine the spotlight on those directly responsible, but the victims all too often are caught in the glare of publicity.

For example in the story of the notorious Cape Flats pimp Armien Andrews, three of his child victims came forward and told of their ordeal – how he allegedly abducted them and held them as his sex slaves. Throughout this time, their identities were protected with the camera focused over the shoulder of the victim and on the reporter.

This story shows that while the angle or ‘hook’ was about Andrews appearing in court, the visuals and the focus of the story was about the girls. The following graph gives a breakdown of how children are portrayed in stories.

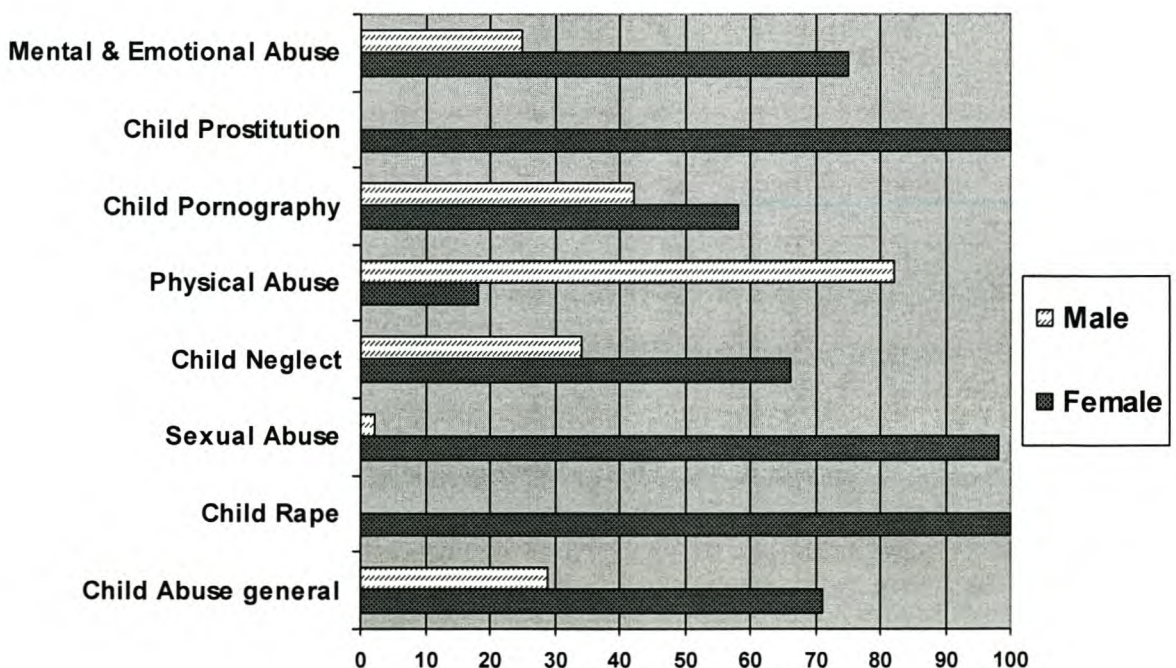
Graph 2. The representation of Child Abuse stories



Child abuse as a topic features in 14% of the items monitored and it fell among the top 9 news items containing children. Given the seriousness of child abuse and the problems it presents it should receive significant coverage by the media. According to the South African Police Service statistics in 2003 more than 4000 cases of child abuse were allegedly reported. In 2004 that number increased to more than 6000 reported cases. These figures only indicate statutory crimes against children and do not include common law crimes such as rape, indecent assault, abduction etc. The South African National Council for Child and Family Welfare indicates these incidents are on the increase.

Child Abuse on e-News constituted 14% of the reporting. “General” referred to stories where abuse was mentioned but not specified. The focus of much of the reporting was on child rape and sexual abuse that together counted for 41%. The reason why this figure may be so high is firstly because it is a reflection of the national statistic which is reportedly is that one in every three people is either raped or abused (Stats SA, 2004), and secondly because these type of stories seem to relish the gory details in the re-telling. The following graph represents how boys and girls are represented in these sub categories.

Graph 3. Representation of girls and boys in abuse stories



Stories about boy and girl children were divided into specific categories. 100% of stories dealing with child rape and prostitution represented female children. With regards to sexual abuse the figure was also very high (98%). In the majority of sub-categories the representation of girl children is much higher than boy children. The exception is in the sub category physical abuse, in which 18% represented boy children and 82% represented girl children (Refer to Graph 3). The reason for this may be that boys are generally considered to be physically stronger than girls and a way of demonstrating power over boys is through physical violence while girls are sexually violated. In the case of child pornography there appeared to be less of a distinction between girls (58%) and boys (42%).

e-News's representation of child abuse tends to re-enforce popular misconceptions about gender, particularly that girls, are violated more often than boys. It is difficult to determine true statistics because of the large number of cases, which are not reported and the stigma, which is still attached to notion of young boys being abused. NGO Women Against Child Abuse estimates that 70% of the cases officially reported are related to girls while around 30% are boy-related (Friedman, 2005). Although CEO Miranda Friedman does state that this figure is slowly on the rise.

With regards to the reporting on child abuse e-News seems to be in keeping with international trends. In the report of the Council of Europe's Committee on Crime Problems, the experts emphasized "the responsibility of the media and their potential contribution to any policy aimed at preventing the sexual exploitation of children and young adults. The term denotes here any means of expression transmitting a message for individuals or groups" (CEC, 2003).

Often e-News functions as a double-edged sword in this area. The unraveling of sex and crime cases involving children and young adults tends to sensationalize certain issues but with a lack of consistent coverage the picture, so to speak, becomes blurred. Sometimes, though, it is e-News, which helps to uncover cases of sexual exploitation and to raise awareness of the problem.

In May 2000 a team of e-News reporters staked out the home of Benjamin Webber Emmerson, a retired accountant. In 1999 he has been convicted on six of seven counts of violating the Sexual Offences Act by abusing underage youths to have sex with him. The main reason why he was refused bail was because of evidence from e-News. The footage showed three boys entering the cove leading into Emmerson's house. This case raises ethical issues, but it can be argued that it was in the public's interest to know if he might possibly be continuing with

sexual predation. Nobody was actively deceived and the results were good for everyone and the truth was served. In this case e-News filled its role as watchdog (Retief, 2002:77).

On the other hand, it is also e-News which, on a broader level, informs the public and perhaps inadvertently fosters a more tolerant attitudes towards child pornography and prostitution and provides the means by which gratification may be reached (for example, by just broadcasting smudged out photographs of child pornography could feed the fetish of a particular type of viewer). Therefore, e-News' co-operation and its orientation towards safeguarding the rights and the dignity of children and young adults are extremely important.

It cannot be denied that the media play a role in bringing the horrors of child exploitation into the public arena and can be extremely influential. In South Africa there are no immediate statistics available, in American research reveals that 72% of the public obtained knowledge of child abuse from newspapers, 56% from radio and TV.

But media researcher Nancy Signorelli raises a practical point,

Although child advocates may argue that sensational coverage distorts and exploits a serious problem – perhaps doing more harm than good – sensationalism solves several editorial problems; that is, it can be the response of reporters and editors trying to fulfill the responsibility to cover serious social issues while continuing to turn a profit. Sensationalism permits an important but unpleasant topic to be covered in such a way that it still captures viewer's attention and sells advertising space (IFJ, 1997).

Still there are several non-governmental organizations, such as Women against Child Abuse, Children First and People Opposed to Woman Abuse who would like to see the media place more emphasis on the role of the police, politicians and other authorities in protecting the children rather than the children themselves. They believe there should be more of an analysis of social causes, the perpetrators, the culture, and the economic circumstances.

Media Researcher Elsa Ramos says “Media should not be so shy about putting the blame on the individuals responsible for the exploitation and the governments that condone it” (IFJ, 1997).

E-news must spend more time and effort on investigating such stories if they want to give true, contextual coverage. Although, in a time of down-sizing, juniorizing and falling editorial expenditure on training and investigative journalism, at e, the outlook for more in-depth media coverage is unlikely.

Still e-News should broaden the scope of reportage. The story of child exploitation in general and its commercial aspects in particular is not being told in full. To examine how this can change requires a look at the professional freedoms, which will help e-News journalists to work effectively. This will be examined in more detail under the Chapter entitled “Conclusions and Recommendations”.

3.1.2. Media Myths and Stereotypes

In the material provided for the World Congress on Children’s Rights (2002) there was a call to the media to avoid exploiting and victimizing the children in their coverage, and to depict them in a way, which maintains their dignity. It is a brave but challenging call. In the theory of representation, a myth is constructed to persuade, to render ‘natural’ or ‘innocent’ that which is profoundly ‘constructed’ or ‘motivated’ (Hall, 1997:179). Myths can lead journalists to mould exploited children into typecast roles as sinners or victims. Whole groups of people are categorized under generalized headlines.

Myths reinforce the feeling of “otherness” and heighten the gulf of misunderstanding. In a survey of US magazine coverage of Child abuse, Nancy Signorielli found that victims were rarely reported reacting to their abuse or condition, for example on e-News it is not uncommon to see a child in a cot in the latent stages of AIDS, but seldom, except in the case of Nkosi Johnson, is that child permitted a sound bite. “Disproportionate preoccupation with even sympathetically presented or “accidental” victims in an underrepresented population, relative to exhibiting their own share of numbers and exercise of power, diminishes and degrades that group” (Gerbner, 1980). This means that it is imperative that in order to avoid an undue identification and by failing to the distinctions between members of a category or class is universally depraving and depriving.

Journalists, driven by deadlines, commercial reminders and productivity, sometimes, take the ill-considered, easy route to newsgathering, perpetuating – whether consciously or unconsciously – these types of myths and stereotypes.

e-News has made on occasion done this in it’s reporting on HIV/AIDS (Refer to Graph 4). The pandemic has enormous implications in South Africa, especially with the high infection rate. It is highly topical and children are used to highlight the effects of the epidemic and elicit sympathy from the viewers. Graph 4 indicates the types of stories about children and HIV/AIDS. Most of the stories (51%) make general reference to children with HIV/AIDS i.e.

these stories make use of general or generic footage of children to highlight an angle. It could be argued that by doing this e-News is not “putting a face” to children and HIV/AIDS. Through the generic use of footage and terminology, the HIV/AIDS epidemic further detaches the viewer.

23% of the stories were about sex education, which are stories where youth are urged to engage in safe sex, for example. Interestingly, in spite of the whole HIV/AIDS debate continually raging in South Africa, the number of stories covering treatments, funds and donations was relatively small (7%). This could indicate that the broadcaster is either avoiding embroiling itself with the controversial nature of this topic or perhaps the broadcaster deemed it irresponsible to report on treatments when most are in their trial phases.

Images of children living with HIV/AIDS often fall into stereotypes, such as the shot of an emaciated, black child, covered in flies in a hospital bed. This perpetuates the myth that AIDS only happens to poor, black people.

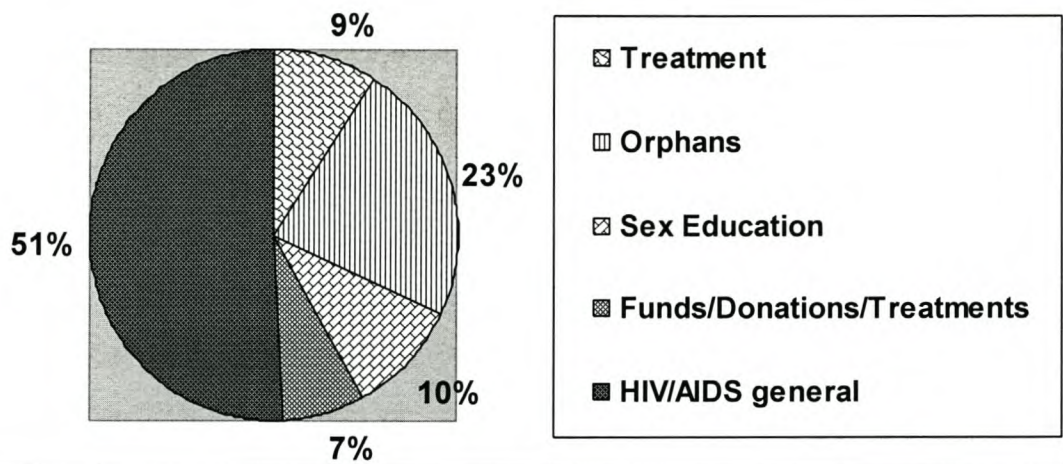
Furthermore the victimization is increased with the disclosure of identities (the children living with AIDS are orphans in 23% of the stories). “Orphans” are often soft targets for the media. Their recourse if misrepresented is virtually non-existent. Images of a sick child, without parents, are an effective way for e-News to draw viewers.

However, the disclosing the identities of children living with AIDS may lead to rejection and an ostracization by family and society. Children often do not understand the consequences of disclosing their status publicly. Furthermore this is problematic because of the myths surrounding HIV/AIDS. It could expose children to rejection and discrimination and therefore secondary trauma. Even children living with a family member who has HIV/AIDS could lead to that child being ostracized. In one story, for example, a seventeen year old and his two sisters are identified after “Their parents died of AIDS six years ago”. All three were clearly identified, as was their home. As an aside, e-News used this story to tag on an advertisement for its upcoming Aids benefit concert to raise funds for children like these.

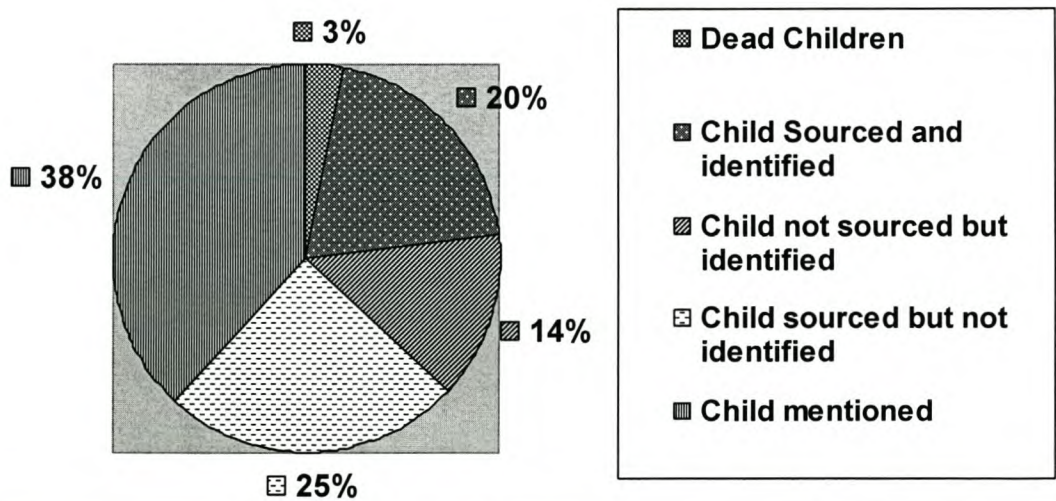
From a legal perspective, when the media, e-News, uses orphans as fodder, justice is required. This is important to the resolution of ethical disputes. All people should be judged alike and treated alike so that there is a measure of fairness. It is important that e-News, therefore establish guidelines to maintain and establish confidential relationships, without intruding on the privacy of children (Day, 2000:28). The idea of justice should determine whether by using a disempowered child, such as an orphan, to tell a story about HIV/AIDS, e-News is playing out a dramatic rendition of stereotyping.

If e-News chooses to use an orphan in it's story there needs to be an awareness to uphold a standard of accountability, which can be enforced either by public opinion or by punitive measures.

Graph 4. Stories on HIV/AIDS



Graph 5. Children Sourced on HIV/AIDS



The monitoring revealed that in stories dealing with HIV/AIDS, 20% of the items sourced and identified children, while 14% identified but did not source children.

This makes a total of 34% of stories in which children were identified. This ties up with the high percentage of stories about orphans. It clearly shows that e-News is contravening the rights of children by interviewing and sourcing children who do not fully understand the consequences and who may not have a guardian or social worker to speak on their behalf.

It becomes clear from looking at the figures in Graph 5 that the legal issue of identifying a minor needs to be addressed by e-News. It is not the duty of e-news to suffice the appetite of the public nor is it in the best interests of the public to divulge a child's status when it comes to HIV/AIDS or child abuse, for example. In the case of children, more attention should be paid to what the public needs to know rather than what they are merely curious about, or what e-News gatekeepers consider sensationally newsworthy. According to Day (2000:129) "there is usually no public interest rationale for publishing the names of AIDS victims unless their disease is directly related to some newsworthy event". An example of this would be 9-year old Nkosi Johnson who appointed himself an ambassador for HIV/AIDS.

However, in the case of crimes related to children, most of the time it is of public interest, but a child has the right to privacy. Although it is the role of the media to inform, and one way in which to inform is to destroy incorrect impressions and stereotypes" (Day, 2000:133), e-News first responsibility is to act fairly and in the best interests of the child.

The International Federation of Journalists encourages journalists and media organizations to take into account the consequences of the publication or broadcast of any material regarding and concerning children. When deciding to report on a case of a child living with HIV/AIDS the journalist has to weigh up the public interest versus the best interest of the child. This is complex because one has to determine what the best interests of the child are – in this case the need for donations and was it necessary to identify the children in order to raise funds for their school fees? As in this case the decision to go public has to be taken by the parents or even by the child themselves, often with little understanding of the consequences.

Additionally the World Health Organization's guidelines for media professionals covering health issues warn that journalists must be mindful of the consequences of the story. While sympathy for a child's situation encapsulates a significant component of the reaction to a report, the fact that a child's HIV status is revealed will stay with him/her for the rest of their lives and will influence, on some level, the way he/she is treated by other people. It is essential for journalists to opt for "informed consent".

The University of Witwatersrand (WITS) initiative, www.journalism.co.za has released Ethical Guidelines for South African media when reporting on HIV/AIDS. “Media actions have consequences for people’s lives. This is especially true in the area of reporting on HIV/AIDS. Stigma and discrimination means that careless reporting could have a serious negative impact on the individual concerned. Media reporting can also perpetuate myths and stereotypes and so contribute to stigma and discrimination”. Within a human rights framework for children, this becomes even more pertinent. Under point III the guidelines state that

- Children are vulnerable to infection and abuse.
- Reporting on children should uphold their right to privacy, confidentiality and informed consent
- Where possible informed consent should be obtained with the knowledge and consent of the children involved from a responsible adult, caregiver or guardian
- Journalists and media organizations should maintain the highest standards of ethical conduct in reporting children’s affairs by:
 - Striving for excellence in terms of accuracy and sensitivity.
 - Avoiding programming and publishing images, which intrude into the children’s space.
 - Avoid using stereotypes and sensational representation to promote journalistic material involving children.
 - Consider carefully the consequences of publishing and broadcasting any material concerning children.
 - Ensuring information provided by children is independently verified and taking special care to ensure this process does not put child informants at risk.
 - Avoiding the use of sexualized images of children.

These guidelines are in keeping with guidelines offered by the educational programme ‘Loveline’ and Health e. It is important to note that the use of language becomes relevant. Journalists should strive to use language that is sensitive and non-stigmatizing, for example the term “person living with HIV/AIDS” is preferable to “Aids victim” or “Aids sufferer” or “HIV epidemic” rather than “HIV plague or scourge”, “Contract HIV”, rather than “Catch HIV”.

Fluids involved in the transmission of AIDS should be specified such as semen, breast milk, blood or vaginal fluids. Not all bodily fluids transmit the virus.

3.2.3. Freedom of Expression and the Challenge of self-regulation

Journalists, on the whole, tend to be wary of regulators. They have much evidence to support the view that intervention in the affairs of journalism inevitably leads to forms of censorship. However it is a legitimate question whether media self-regulation is a sufficient answer to public concern over standards of journalism in an age when the changing media landscape and particularly the growth of global media enterprise appears, in theory at least, to put the media beyond the range of national public accountability.

South Africa had a history of censorship until ten years ago. Freedom of Speech is the backbone of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. But as Retief (2002:220) argues, it is not an absolute right and at what cost should free expression be defended?

In the case of children, for example, hardcore pornography in a programme for children would be inappropriate; proving that freedom of speech is not an absolute right without restriction. It comes with responsibilities. What should lead e-News to greater responsibility without sanction? Social responsibility requires control (internal in terms of guidelines or ethics) or external in terms of the Broadcasting and Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCCSA). Ultimately e-News should be in a position to self-regulate. This means that its “social contract” with regards to its duties to child-rights must be upheld.

There is external control for e-News. Section 29 of the present Films and Publications Act 65 of 1996, which was passed in April 1997, upholds the rights of children. Care is taken to protect children against sexual exploitation or degradation in publications, films and on the Internet. It is a punishable offence. Broadcaster, such as e-TV, has to familiarize them with the law before broadcasting what may and may not be broadcast. They are also not allowed to broadcast material which is XX rated, i.e. showing a person under the age of 18 engaging in or assisting someone else to engage in sexual conductor a lewd display of nudity.

The South African Human Rights Commission – a quasi independent watchdog – is best known for its report into racism in the media after it received complaints from black lawyers and accountants for alleged racial bias in some newspapers. An interim reports in November 1999 accused newspapers and broadcasters as portraying black people as irrational and incompetent and in many cases merely as criminals. The commission caused uproar among journalists and

free speech organizations when it subpoenaed 40 journalists to testify. Amid accusations of McCarthyism, the commission rescinded the subpoenas and asked journalists to testify voluntarily. The yearlong investigation concluded with a statement by SAHRC's then Chairperson Barney Pityana stated, "South Africa's media are racist institutions".

Another watchdog is the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCCSA). It encourages members of the public to lodge a complaint if he/she finds broadcast material offensive or bias.

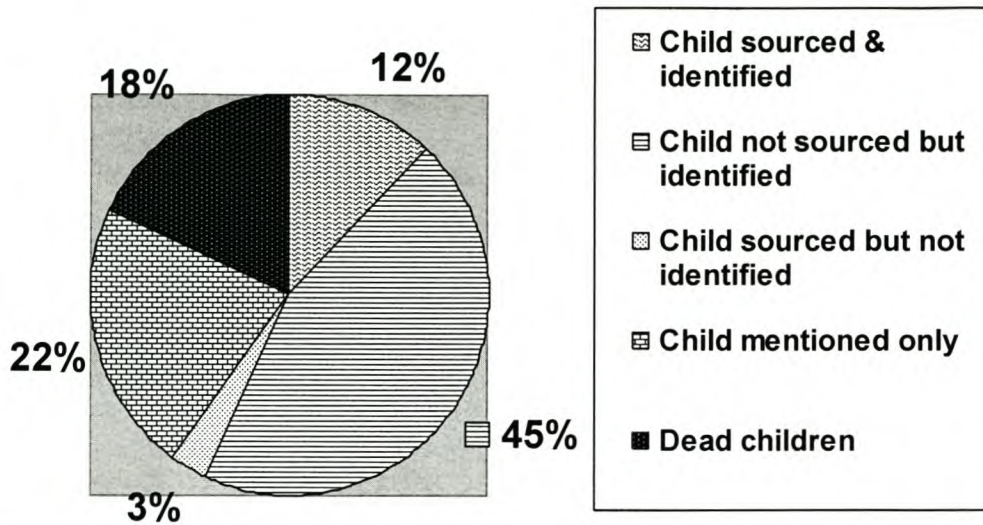
The Gender Commission also closely monitors how women are portrayed in the media. As yet, it is only really the Media Monitoring Project that has taken up the cause of how children are portrayed in the media.

With regards to the reporting on children, e-News and other media organizations require greater scrutiny during times of war, a time when media ethics become blurred. E-TV lacks the resources to dispatch a crew to war-torn zones to "get the story" so it relies heavily on Reuters agency footage. Therefore in order to reflect international news, the station has to use the images fed through daily by Reuters. Reuters is the only international agency that e-TV has a signed agreement with.

There is a precarious balance between informing people about the war and at the same time protecting the right to dignity and privacy of those already suffering as a result of the war. Ideally, e-News should do more than just report on the facts and events. The reports need to be accurate, fair, interrogative and more importantly placed within a framework of human rights. One recalls particular footage of a bleeding Iraqi child being extracted from his bombed home in which his parents and siblings had just been killed. Close-up shots of his pained expression were beamed across the country. In another instance a Palestinian child with bandages around his head was interviewed on watching the Israeli soldier's storm into his family home.

During the monitoring period the war in Iraq received prominent coverage. Images included children in various stages of distress, including graphic visuals of their war injuries. Contrasted with brutality of war, the child is the epitome of innocence and vulnerability.

Graph 6. Children sourced in war



18% of the reports featured children who died (Refer to Graph 6). In many of the reports the children's voices or opinions are not heard. 45% of the reports identified children but did not source them.

The question being asked is whether e-News pushed the limit in broadcasting such graphic visuals. "While some maintain that images of war are used to make an indictment against war (Clarke, 1997:159), or to communicate to the reader the atrocities of war, it can be argued that images of death and despair also produce "compassion fatigue" (Taylor, 1998). It appears as though the "horror makes for fascination". This problem is compounded when the images contain children as they represent the most vulnerable sector of society and the horror is supposed to be greatest when these innocents are violated.

What e-News did do is warn its viewers that the upcoming visuals were of a violent nature. This was particularly so with regards to the brutal fighting in Haiti where the streets were littered with bodies, some of them children.

3.1.4 Building images of Children, sex and violence in the media

There is increasing alarm worldwide that the way children are portrayed by the media today may increase the risks they face. The impact of public pressure on the media, on this issue

as any other, should not be under-estimated. Parents and educators in France, for instance, have been urged to react when TV stations show material lacking in respect of children (IFJ, 1996:16).

While internationally the boundaries between child and adult are sometimes blurred, parents have sometimes colluded with the media in the exploitation of their children, an recurring example of this is the story of what is called the ‘street-strollers’ (May 2004) – these are parents who use their children as a source of income, through begging etc. Another story, which receives much broadcast attention, is beauty pageants for children.

We inhabit a culture, which makes a great deal of money out of the mass premature sexualisation of children. Their music, their clothes, the TV, film they watch and the teen magazines they read envelop them in a miasma of sexuality. Children who are glued to the set have been turned into voyeurs as the peepshow of adult behavior ... Popular culture presents to them as normal a brutally crude, mechanistic world in which sexual gratification is another commodity, available not just to adults but to them, along with the clothes, CD’s and cosmetics (Gerbner, 1980).

Little wonder, that some adults (and journalists) believe children are “adult-enough” to appear in news footage without parental consent and without having their identities concealed. The definition of childhood appears to differ from culture to culture. The problem researcher Rachel O’ Brien believes arises from adults looking at young people in a certain way: appropriating them for their own use. They create exploitative and in extreme cases pedophile images.

All this makes the notion of a ‘youth oriented society’ into a slogan of little substance, concludes George Gerbner. The media are oriented towards ‘markets and power’ rather than youth (Gerbner, 1980). Societal values have changed and they have been driven largely by a media that prizes youth.

This is why it is important that e-News in its coverage of crime exercises due caution and sensitivity particularly when reporting on children, regardless of whether they are victims or perpetrators.

The majority of these reports are factual and details seem at one with the visuals. But they based on a human rights framework and mostly lack information that is empowering. The challenge, with television news, is doing this all in one and a half minutes, with a sound bite or two of 15 to 20 seconds each. The challenge is to try and report on facts that do not sound like an

inevitable daily occurrence to which people are powerless victims or bystanders, but to rather present the information in a way that is empowering.

What is also important to remember in the reporting on crime is whether relevant family members have been notified of all the facts in a case. There have been incidents in the past when family members have found out about evidence of abuse through the media instead of through the police. Journalists should work in accordance with the Criminal Procedures Act.

The same is true for reporting on children with disabilities. On e-News these children have received marginal coverage and received only 1% coverage in the news media. Children with disabilities are often referred to as “other” or different from the norm. Emphasis is often placed on the disability making the disability the defining feature of that child. The language also tends to be insensitive with children being referred to as “retarded”, or in one case “children like these ...”.

In conclusion, children are an important part of news and in South Africa they are part of a growing market. The Constitution guarantees freedom of speech, but freedom of speech is not an absolute right. In Chapter 2 (Section 28) of the Constitution it states, for example, that juvenile court proceeding must be held *in camera*, and that the names of juvenile offenders may not be made public. There are also international conventions to protect children’s rights.

In the case of children, e-news has to take the moral high ground. E-News is one of the agents of social change, but it requires regulation (self or external) through justice and a sense of fairness on the way in which it reports on children.

The ethical and legal dilemma exists in treading the line between the protection of children’s rights and freedom of expression. What role should e-news play in the lives of young people in South Africa? Is it e-news’s responsibility to instill values? These questions will be addressed in Chapter 4.

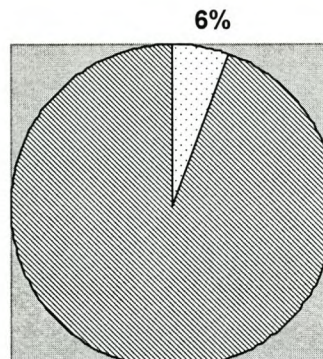
Chapter 4

Key Findings

This chapter will break down the collected data from the sample of 71 stories. Through this it will be possible to establish trends and thereby pinpoint areas, which can be improved on with regards to the coverage of children on e-News, particularly within a human rights framework.

4.1 Representation of children on e-News

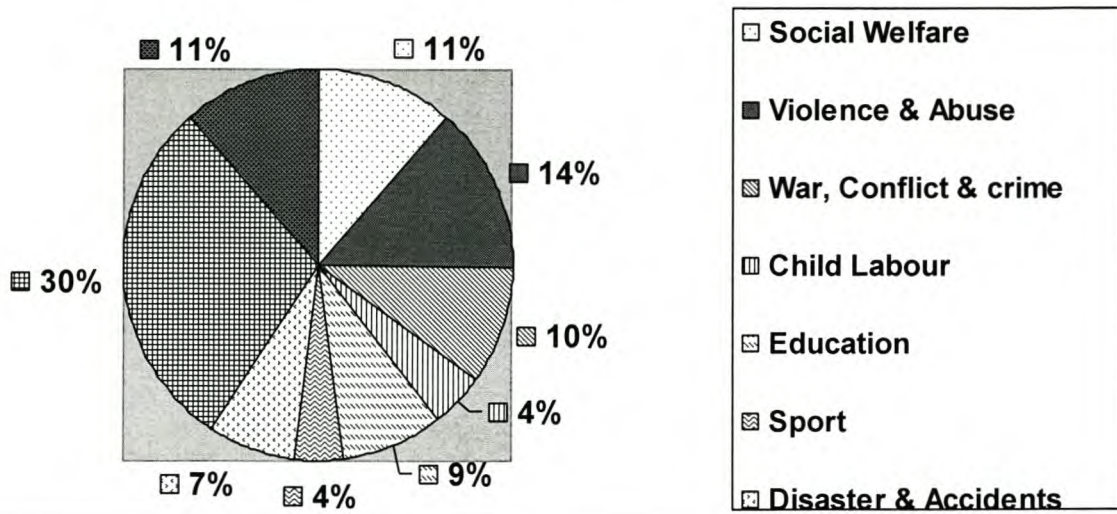
Graph 7. Percentage of children stories on e-News



Only 6% of all monitored news items between January and August contained subject matter or images about children (Refer to Graph 7). This suggests that children and children's issues are not considered "hot topics" for e-News, not unless, as figures later in this research will prove, children figure in a scandalous, heart-breaking story or in some shocking data or statistics.

4.2 Types of e-New stories in which children appear

Graph 8. Top 9 topics containing references to children



The results show that almost 50% or 1 in every 2 stories is negative (Refer to Graph 9). Although stories about disasters and accidents (7%) were fewer than those about violence and abuse (14%) and war, crime and conflict (10%), they could have been used to appeal to the public's collective heart. The public tends to view accidents that happen to children as worse than those that happen to adults (MMP, 2004). There is a perception that children are innocent and still have a long life ahead of them. Although what tends to happen is that the child is mentioned in the headline, for example "Four children killed in horror car crash" ("Crash" 26 June 2004), but they are then seldom the subject matter of the story, which will be about the crash itself. This story was also carried during the Arrive Alive campaign over the mid-year holiday season.

Child abuse stories were covered in two different ways. Firstly during the time of this research several paedophiles were arrested and appeared in court. These stories were covered with scant information about the victims. In terms of UN Convention on the Rights of this child Act, the child's right to privacy must be maintained at all times, for example, in one story Sebastian van As said "The word paedophile means lover of children so all places where there are a lot of children like schools, crèches or like this hospital attract people with those kind of tendencies". "And James McNeil was one such paedophile. He managed to get a job posing a Father Christmas for sick children at Red Cross Hospital (Rice, 2004).

The second approach to stories on child abuse was to use the child as the subject matter. This is in keeping with an e-News philosophy to personalize a story, for example "Five year old

Rafiq Hardien had been missing for three weeks, before police found his body on a field in Mitchell's Plain, Cape Town" (Kiewitz, 2004). Although the accompanying picture of the 5 year olds face violates the child's right to privacy, it was used to highlight the plight of missing children of which there were a spate and the reporter had received permission from the parents to use their child's photograph. So, the children's right to life and right to privacy overruled his right to privacy.

Health and HIV/AIDS (30%) was the subject that received the highest coverage in news about children. According to UNAIDS, HIV/AIDS "has personally affected one quarter of all Africans" (International Partnership against AIDS in Africa, 2000). This makes it an issue, which should be top of the news agenda. Perhaps linked to this is the high figure of Social Welfare (11%). The Social Welfare department and countless Non-governmental organizations have spearheaded HIV/AIDS initiatives and the need for coverage to address this "national crisis" is high. There is a recognition among government officials and NGO's such as the Lovelife campaign to break the silence surrounding this epidemic and that the best way is through the media, for example "This seventeen year old sleeps on his parents bed each night. He shares this room with his two younger sisters, aged fifteen and thirteen. His parents died of Aids six years ago" (Mthembu, 2004). The faces of all the children, living in Tembisa, were revealed and they were also interviewed. While the gist of the story is a topical one in the media – the increasing number of child-headed households – the story does prejudice the children within their communities, as the issue of HIV/AIDS is still largely a taboo of white people protecting their children. Their vulnerability is heightened by the fact that they have no parents or guardians who can protect their rights.

It is disappointing to note, however, the low figure for child-labour (4%). As a country with an unemployment rate hovering around a percentage in the high forties, children have been increasingly used as a source of informal (begging, child prostitution) and formal (advertisements) labour. As indicated in Chapter 5, a large percentage of the News decision-makers (32%) believe that Child Labour should receive high priority. The reasons why this didn't happen will be explained in Chapter 5 on Agenda-Setting.

This is a very narrow representation of children. It could be argued that given this negativity, it is easier for the public to perceive children mainly as victims.

However, there is no denying that children's stories do feature as big news when they are broadcast. This research shows that the majority of children's stories were placed in the top

segment of a news bulletin. In 90% of the cases the story about the child was carried in a headline. But in more than 60% of the stories, the subject matter was invalidating, meaning that it does not conform to the CRC. Invalidating suggests that the information about the child is disempowering and it undermines the child's human rights by not placing it within context. It means that the rights of the child are often ignored i.e. that permission is not sought to film the child, breaching the child's right to privacy, the right to confidentiality and the right to information (which is the right to know the consequences of appearing on e-News in front of a national audience).

Judging from the content, it would appear that children are mainly newsworthy when the topics are sensational, moving or theatrical, such as the following examples. From the sample of 71 child related stories, 51 were sensational stories. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines sensational as "causing or intending to cause great public excitement etc" (Oxford Dictionary, 1990:1102). In news terms it could be described as reaction to a specific event, which by its very nature is freakish, exceptional, highly emotive or dramatic:

- Four children between the ages of 14 and 26 were deemed "wild" children after they were found isolated on a farm in the Free State. Psychologists believe all the children to be mentally challenged because of their lack of social skills and imitation of the animals they saw in the veld (Stanley, 2004). Mentally challenged children (17%) are popular as subject matter, as are Aids orphans (23%) and street children (16%). All these children are "soft targets". Another example was the story of a woman who "concealed" ten mentally challenged children behind her home in Soshanguve. This story was heralded as an "Exclusive" with "dramatic footage". "At least ten mentally challenged children between the ages of four and thirteen had been living in this military tent" (Mokgatla, 2004).

E-News also featured the story of a law to enable the "sterilization" of mentally challenged youngsters. The footage again homed in on the facial features of these children (Green, 2004)

- Another story was of a six-year old girl in Umlazi, teased for the way a disease had ravaged her face. Close-ups of this little girls' deformed face were used throughout the insert. One could argue that the footage was a sympathy bid used to aid the appeal for operation donations, but according to the Bill of Rights it was still a violation of her rights to privacy (Nzimande, 2004).

- Another child story was of a ten-year old Zimbabwean boy, Moses, who had undergone an operation at the Walter Sisulu Paediatric Cardiac Centre. Visuals show him running, laughing and yelling “I feel so much better” (Tshabalala, 2004). This could be an example where a child is used in a story in a positive way. His joy is evident from the visuals. His right to freedom of expression is not violated, instead he is empowered by speaking for himself thus anchoring his status as a human being, with all the rights associated with it, in society.
- A story about a gang of street children caught on camera mugging a passer-by made headlines. The “dramatic” footage was looped to cover the insert. This was a story set in Brazil and the visuals were murky as they were taken off a street camera. (“Brazil”, 2004)
- When Cape Town Mayor Nomaindia Mfeketo announced plans to remove street children off the streets and into places of safety, there was indiscriminate use of street-children footage, many sniffing glue from plastic bottles. (This followed the story of a child called “Xolani” who was gunned down outside a strip club). (Kiewitz, 2004)
- Other stories, which used children as dramatic pegs, were stories of illness and suffering. There is an old journalism adage, which states, “If it bleeds, it leads” and in the case of children that is particularly pertinent. The story of three-year old Karabo Gwala shocked viewers when he fell down an open sewer in Soweto. The story ran over two weeks and culminated with repeated shots of his lifeless body being pulled from the sewer. (Tshabalala, 2004). This story tugged at the heartstrings, but in death the right of the child to privacy was violated and was gratuitous.
- Then there was the story of what the reporter referred to as the “headless boy” – a toddler found on a dumping site after disappearing two days previously. Close-up shots were shown of his bloodstained shoes and what is called a “muti-package” as well as an interview with grieving mother. The script read, “Lethokuhle’s body was found without a head. While other children are playing outside their homes, Lethokuhle’s headless body lies in a local mortuary. Police say they are investigating a case of what looks like a muti-killing” (Mokgatla, 2004). This story was not handled in a sensitive manner and breached again, the right to dignity.

Such stories typically capture the attention of the viewer by shocking him/her. While the media must consider commercial imperatives (particularly e-News which,

attracts income through advertising), they should not surpass the imperative to educate and inform the public and uphold human rights.

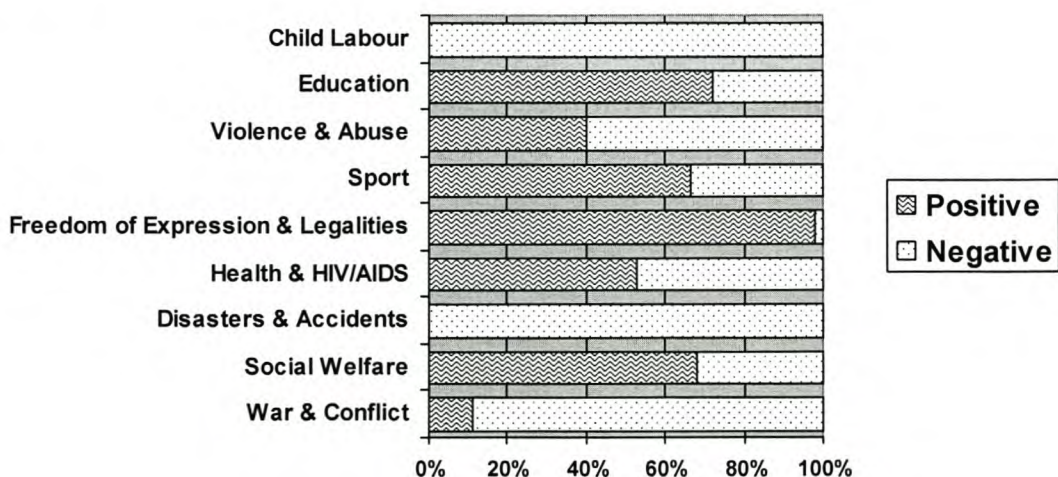
It is understood that the media must report bad news in order to raise awareness about particular issues in society but news reports relating to these topics are most likely to communicate information about the who, what, where, when and how of the event with little or no information provided about the framework of human rights.

In addition, when it is predominantly these types of stories that are placed on the agenda, it limits the way that children are represented in the media and perpetuates a discourse of victim hood and powerlessness.

This next graph (Graph 9) looks at the percentage of positive versus negative stories taken from the sample of 71. By ‘positive’ is meant stories, which are constructional and could be perceived as taking the direction of progressive. These stories would make the distinction in favour of the group, which in this case would be the children.

By ‘negative’ is meant a story, which diminishes or counteracts the process of being constructive.

Graph 9. % Positive and negative stories



The items analyzed here are all news items. Health and HIV/AIDS received mostly positive coverage (53%), followed by Social Welfare stories (68%), which contained subject matter, mainly about HIV/AIDS initiatives and projects. Drugs and drug rehabilitation also fell under this category. An example would be the following: “Parents of drug-addicted children at the Noupoot Christian Care Centre have vowed to do everything in their power to keep their

doors open. A government-appointed task team has recommended it be closed. It's found that Noupoot does not comply with the minimum standards of a drug treatment programme" (Stanley, 2004).

As one would expect there was a high percentage (89%) of stories about War and Conflict. Positive stories in this category included the release of hostages who were reunited with their children. Largely negative were stories about War and Conflict (89%) (The reason why this figure may be so high on e-News between January and August could also have been because of the "War on Iraq". During this time many more pictures of children were shown from the war zone. The Violence and Abuse of children in stories also received a large negative percentage of 40%. The stories were mainly about the arrest of alleged paedophiles on child prostitution charges.

Overall the number of negative news reports was in the majority with a total of around 64%. Positive reports totaled at around 36%. This phenomenon indicates that the media is more readily available to cover children's issues when they are facing hardship, but it does not take one step further by taking a pro-active step to report the dangers of such happenings before they take place, nor does it contextualize the story within a human rights framework. Has the child been protected against discrimination or punishment? Has the child been protected against the beliefs of parents, legal guardians or family members? Many of the stories are reactive rather than contextual. This means that they do not place the issues within a human rights framework.

This type of news "sells" as compared to non-sensational child-rights issues. This proves that the coverage of children's issues in the media is passive rather than pro-active. As could be expected the more negative or 'bad news' topics such as crime, child abuse, war/conflict/violence and disasters and accidents had more negative stories. These topics had roughly a 60-40 split in terms of negative and positive stories.

Positive stories included an in-depth look at initiation for young boys in Kwazulu Natal. This story used the deaths from circumcision as a peg, but the report illustrated the cultural reasoning behind the ritual and how it should be done to avoid fatality (Mzimande, 2004). Another was about the beginning of spring and showed images of children frolicking in the sea (Henny, 2004). Yet another gave a positive spin on street children. Shaherezade Safla did a story of two former street children who are part of an advertising campaign to keep children off the streets (Safla, 2004). An intern did a story on a young boy who is a computer prodigy.

When children are covered in the news, crime, accidents and violence are the most common subjects covered. The Media's role in terms of this is complex. On the one hand they tell the stories of the abused and the abuser. But on the other hand, they can themselves become the exploiter, with sensational interviews and gratuitous footage (more footage than is needed to satisfy the public's right to be informed). For example, the story of the disfigured six-year old Umlazi child. The story states that, "already Noluthando Maphumulo has had first hand experience of being ostracized ... [UPSOUND: Mother] "The worst was she said she couldn't find a friend at school"" (Mzimande, 2004). In this case not only has the child to face her friends, but thousands of people across South Africa, plus her mother's comments place her immediately in a position of victimhood. This story treads a tenuous line between raising awareness to raise funds and protecting the child against discrimination.

This could have been approached in a more sensitive manner. It would have been preferable to describe the child's face but to film her from the back or to focus on her hands or feet. It is gratuitous to show the child face-on and it is a violation of her right to privacy. In this regard, the journalist acted irresponsibly without thinking through the consequences.

Furthermore the way the media portray children has a profound impact on society's attitude to children and childhood, which also affects the way adults behave. Even the images children themselves see, especially of sex and violence, influence their expectation of their role in life.

In short the way in which children have been represented had three main characteristics:

- **Passivity** – such a news item about children's criminal responsibility in which images of children were used but children themselves did not take part in or contribute to the discussion, for example the latest United Nations research which states that every year one million children are forced into pornographic productions around the world; or the story of two young children, born into a customary marriage, who are challenging a long-standing South African Law, with the back of the Human Rights Commission (Mokgatla, 2004).

In the story about World Asthma Day, however, 13-year old Robin Rhoda – a long-term asthma sufferer – is asked his opinion and he responds by saying "I have learnt to control my asthma" (Kiewitz, 2004).

- **Entertainment** – children being used for adult entertainment or innocently mimicking adult performers, for example, the story about child who is a computer genius at six. This is an adult's set of values placed on a child. He gains recognition from being "the other".
- **Emotion** – the use of children to illustrate societal issues in the news, such as mortally ill children being used to illustrate HIV/AIDS, for example, the story of a young boy raising his two sisters from the age of eleven, after their parents died of HIV/AIDS-related illnesses, the Umlazi girl and the story of Karabo Gwala.

In other words, even where children were the subject of the debate and being discussed as responsible for their own actions, they were not considered sufficiently responsible to take part in a discussion.

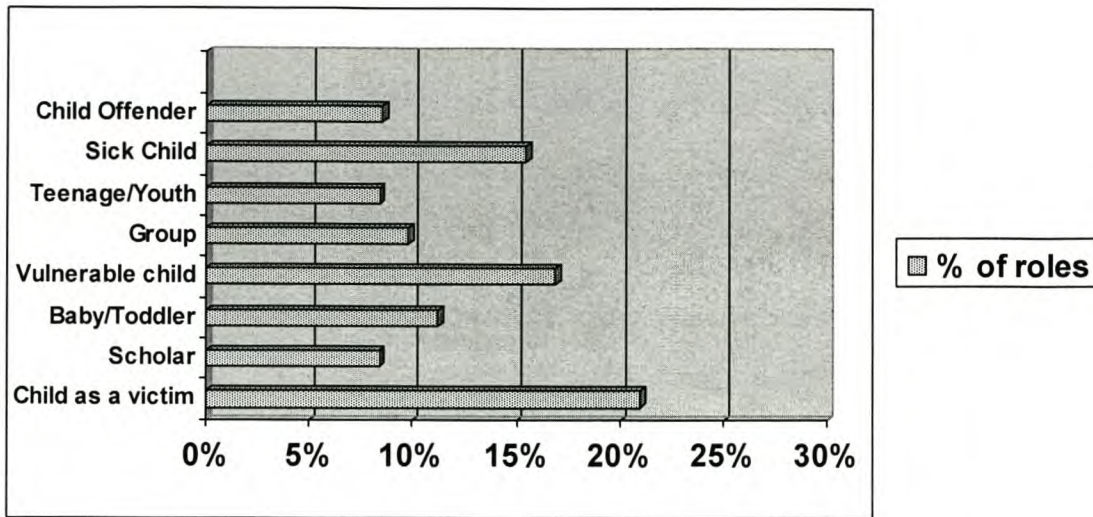
Although there are a percentage of stories where children are given the opportunity to express an opinion (26%) (Refer to Graph 12, p 60), it is often with rigorous adult coaching and, of course, in television, the interview is subjected to strict editing to fit in with time constraints.

4.3. Roles of children in e-News stories

There are cases in the reporting on child-related issues when the journalist is unable to see a distinction between members of a category or class, particularly when it comes to children. Children may be seen as identical or identified. "Often such categorization with language [and visuals] and failure to recognize differences between individuals leads to stereotyping" (Severin et al, 1988:60).

Graph 10 indicates how e-News breaks down the roles of children and in which roles children are most reported on.

Graph 10. % Of roles given to children in stories



Children were represented as victims in 21% of the items analyzed (Refer to Graph 10). Children in news stories are seldom portrayed as individuals. Most stories focused on bigger groups, such as a school or merely ‘children’, meaning all children. When the story covered only one child, it was often about crime, accidents or violence and the child was portrayed as a victim or perpetrator (8.5%).

In 9.8% of the cases children were represented as a group. In more than 90% of the stories children were reported on as individuals. This means that there is a consciousness about seeing children as individuals and it means that the journalists and gatekeepers are engaging in a range of possibilities when reporting on children, thus steering away from stereotyping.

The depiction of children as victims through the use of language and pictures can be used with the intention to elicit emotion from viewers or to shock them about a particular event. This links to the other topics in which children are most depicted – War and Conflict, and Crime and Abuse. It would appear that an additional component of children’s newsworthiness is their role as victims. This is because children are primarily viewed as powerless, helpless, vulnerable victims.

On e-News there were a couple of examples of this in the story of the Umlazi child, the shots were taken from the top down, reducing her stature as well as victimizing her with the story content. The rights of mentally challenged children are often violated because they are less likely to respond or know that their rights are breached, as in the case of the home which was shut down in Soshanguve. As well as being homeless, full face-on shots were taken of them to

highlight the less-than adequate living conditions at the home. They are clearly uncomfortable and distressed by the camera because some are cowering; others are crying (Mokghatla, 2004)

To add to their sense of vulnerability (16.9%), in 15.4% of the reports, children were reported on when they were sick (often with a life-threatening disease). Children are also identified in more passive roles such as babies and toddlers. On e-News this occurred in 11.6% of the stories. The popular representation of children as infants may be attributed to the appeal they elicit in adults, and also because of the vulnerability and innocence they represent. In these passive roles the child is not recognized in its individual capacity but often takes on the characteristics of the group.

However, there can be dangers in saturating the public with too much “poor child” exposure. It can therefore create acceptance and indifference. If the coverage of children remains singular in its approach to the plight of the victim or the salacious nature of the offences involved, instead of raising awareness, it could flick the switch off.

Of the top nine roles “child offender” is only role in which children are overtly represented in a negative and “powerful” role (8.4%). E-News carried one story of an eleven year old that slit her best friends throat with a knife after she was allegedly teased on the Internet (Henny, 2004).

Another role, which might be applicable here, is the role of “survivor”. Whereas children with illness may indeed be survivors, in these stories they are not held up as examples of overcoming the odds, but rather as weak and feeble and part of an extremely small minority. This illustrates the scarcity of positive representations of children.

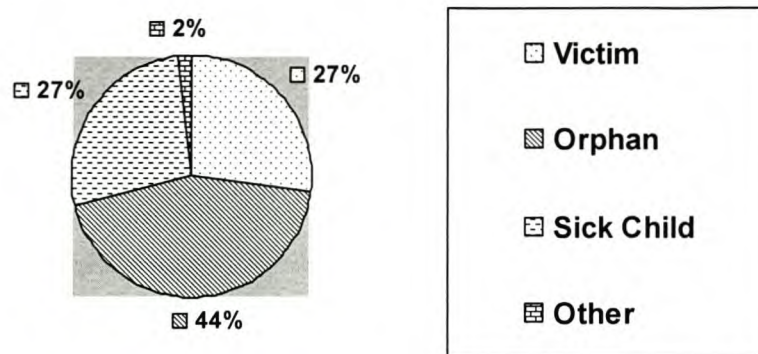
In the material provided for the World Congress there is a call to the media to avoid exploiting and victimizing the child in their coverage, and to depict them in a way, which maintains their dignity (IFJ, 1996:11). Researcher Peter Almond points out, “the media cling to these myths; they are familiar, convenient, easily adapted to conventional formats of news and entertainment. In short, myth is easier to report than the subtle and complicated reality” (IFJ, 1996:11).

4.4 Children and HIV/AIDS

In the previous chapter the coverage of HIV/AIDS was discussed. Given the scope of HIV/AIDS and its relevance to South Africa, the topic is worthy of a separate report. It is one of

the most prominent topic categories identified. Graph 11 dissects the categories into which e-News places children living with HIV/AIDS.

Graph 11. How children are portrayed in stories about HIV/AIDS



An analysis of the roles in HIV/Aids items revealed that 44% of the children were identified as “orphans”. As it is such a frequent topic of media reports, it is important to note that child-headed households also fall under this category. While this figure is in line with the overall representation noted earlier, identifying children infected with or affected by HIV/AIDS is problematic as it may lead to further stigmatization. This may be why e-News rarely focuses on an identified child (such as Nkosi Johnson, for example), but tends to give quite extensive coverage to homes for HIV/AIDS orphans, for example “Flora Mogano set up the Good Hope home are centre in Tembisa in 2001. And for the past three years she’s been caring for people living with HIV/AIDS” (Mthembu, 2004).

UNAIDS and the World Health Organisation (WHO) indicate that more than 6 million children have been infected with the virus since the epidemic began. Over 10 million children have lost their mothers to AIDS before the age of 15. This makes it more than a “hot topic” for the media. It should make reporting on HIV/AIDS a cause.

The second and third most common role in which children were identified was as “victims” and “sick child” which accounted for 27%, each. While this is a critical societal issue, the emphasis obscures the diversity of additional and, in many instances more common ways, in which children are affected by HIV/Aids. This emphasis is reinforced not only by the media but also by donor organizations and other bodies.

By proclaiming children who live with or are affected by HIV/AIDS to be victims, perpetuates disempowerment, especially when many survive adverse conditions and continue to live full lives. It is important to note that a “victim” loses his/her sense of humanity and

individuality. They are portrayed as being unable to think, speak or act for them. This leads us onto the next section which will determine how often children are sourced for their own opinions. By allowing a child to engage in their right to speak for themselves they are affirming their status as members of society who are offered equal access to freedom of speech as any other member of society.

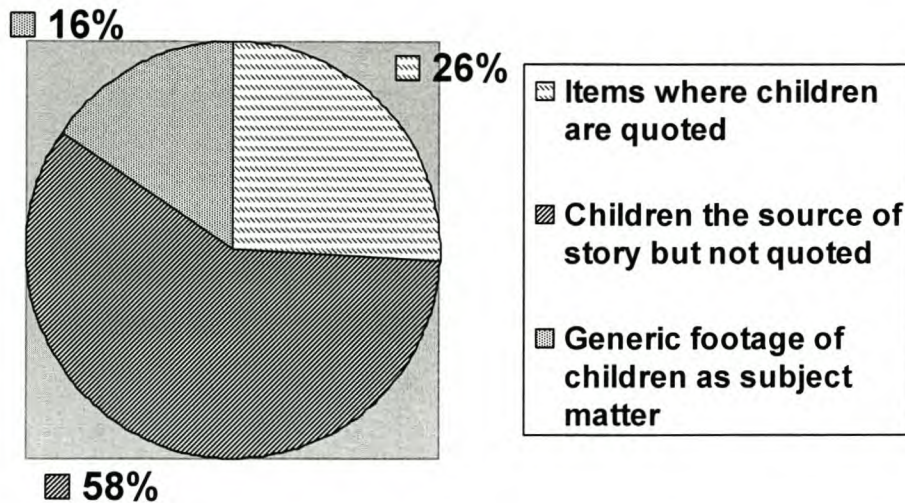
4.5 How often are children sourced or accessed for their opinions?

e-News as part of the media web in South Africa plays its part in influencing an audience's worldview. As such it must also take responsibility. As explained before there is an interest in protecting the youth. But the dilemma lies in upholding this responsibility while still encouraging the principles of freedom of speech and autonomy. However children are not autonomous. They rely on others for their moral guidance. Conventional wisdom holds that the value systems of juveniles are immature and therefore need protection and nurturing (Day, 2000:326).

However the vision of children as innocent and weak has changed over time as the "space" between adulthood and childhood as shrunk. Traditional family values have diminished and children have matured quicker.

In light of this Graph 12 indicates how often children are sourced for their opinions in an attempt to answer what moral obligations e-News has in dealing with children as the subject of the story?

Graph 12. % Of children sourced for their opinions



In 58% of the news stories about children on e-TV between January and August 2004, children were the subject matter but were not given a voice. Children spoke in about a third of all stories about children (this is higher than in international studies. In Sweden, Petra Dahlgren indicates that only one-fifth of stories on TV contain a sound bite from a child). When they were allowed to speak, the stories were often about a group of children, such as in a school or at a Children's Day event. The stories seldom concerned the specific child who spoke. Most common was that adults spoke about children and sometimes even spoke for them. There were some glaring examples on e-News. In Mokgathla's story (Mokgathla, 2004) about two young children challenging customary law with the backing of the Human Rights Commission, there is no sound bite from the children. Similarly in the story of the seventeen year old who is raising his two sisters after their parents died from AIDS, even though their faces are shown, it is a caregiver who gives the soundbite "[I said to them] don't you know that you are orphans and that you are not supposed to pay school fees? Moreover you are so poor, you are so poor. How can they expect you to pay school fees where as they don't even have food? Why didn't you come and tell me so that I can approach your principal?" (Mthembu, 2004).

Thus, comments from adults about how children think, what they like disliked were made without allowing the children to respond themselves. Even when the children did speak, they spoke in the shadow of adults – in most of these stories too, more adults than children expressed themselves. Children appeared in the footage in four-fifths of the stories. In almost

one-fifth of these children were not mentioned in the story at all, but only used as generic footage.

26 % of the Children in e-News stories gave an opinion. The average number of sources per insert containing subject matter about or pertaining to a child is on average two. The majority of these sources, however, are adults (58%), even though; in total children appear in over 74% of the stories. This suggests that children are given a limited opportunity to represent themselves, to exercise their right to participation, and to express their views and opinions in matters that affect them.

In television, visuals have a greater impact than words and are more likely to attract the viewer. As Gunter noted:

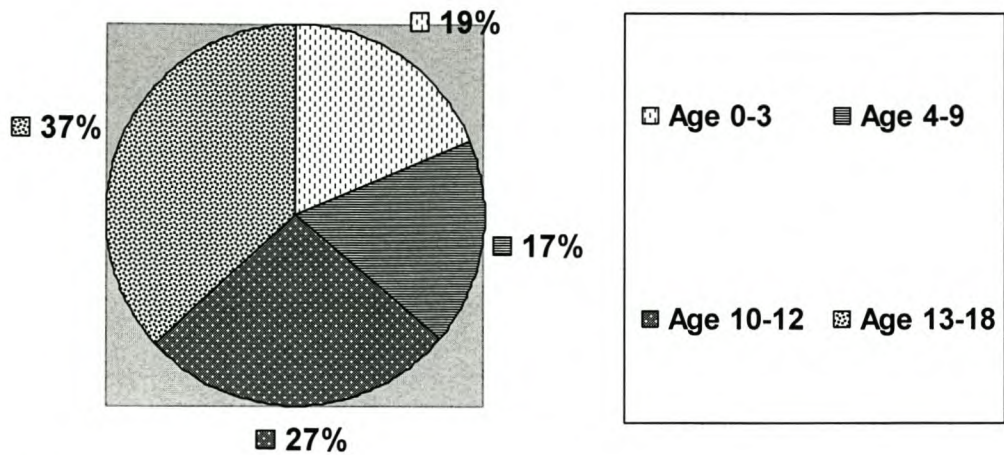
TV news journalists believe in using the visual potential of the medium to its full extent, with film and videotape materials favored over still photos and graphs in portraying news stories. News producers appear to subscribe to the adage that “a picture is worth a thousand words” and that film and videotaped material are needed to provide the most complete and comprehensive story, given that television is such a visual medium (as cited by Robinson et al, 1986:137).

However, without interviewing them, journalists can reinforce the social stereotype where children are seen but not heard as they are so seldom accessed for their opinions, even in stories, which affect them directly. An example of this would be a story covered in November when member of the AWF (African Wrestling Federation) visited children living with HIV/AIDS. Whereas the reporter had exceeded the required number of sources, which at e-News is normally between 2/3, (from the pediatrician, wrestlers and Social worker) there were no sound bites from the children (Green, 2004).

4.6 Age of children in e-News?

Tying in with the sourcing of children for their opinion is, of course, their age. Age and maturity are important considerations in evaluating media content. As the lines between childhood, adolescence and adulthood become less distinct ethical questions become more pertinent. Graph 13 breaks down the sample of 71 stories on e-News between January and August 2004 into age categories.

Graph 13. % Of children in different age groups

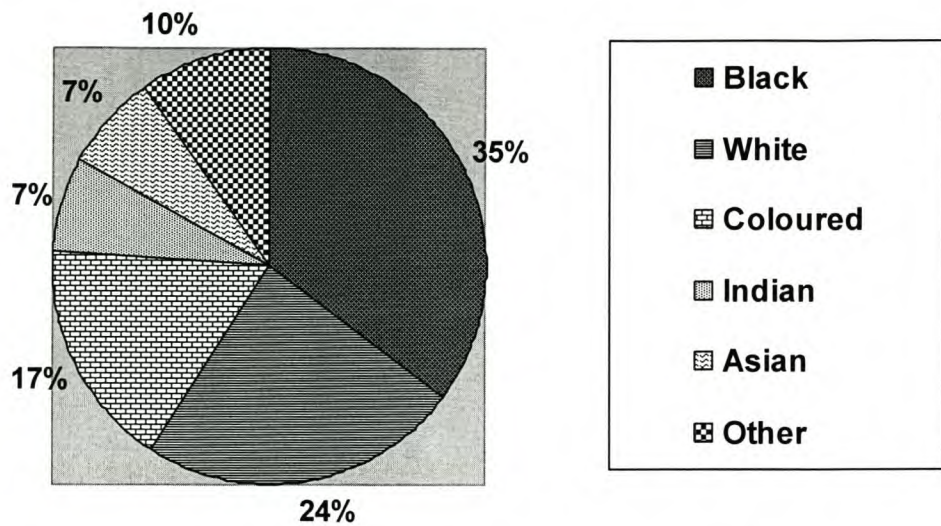


Teenagers between 13 and 18 years of age received the most coverage on e-News (37%) (Refer to Graph 14). This relates in part to topics in which children appear particularly education and freedom of expression issues. At this age, children are more society conscious and more aware of their rights.

4.7 Racial Profile of Children on e-News

Race and representation of race in the media are particularly important because of South Africa's apartheid history. The Africa Charter on Children's Broadcasting was ratified in Algiers in June 2000 and it states in Article 4 "Children should hear, see and express themselves, their culture, their language and their life experiences, through the electronic media which affirm their sense of self, community and place". That is why it is important to include this section as a category when looking at children's rights on e-News.

Graph 14. % Of Children classified according to race



This assignment uses the standard racial classifications still used in South Africa: Black, White, Coloured, Indian, and Asian, because it will help determine which groups are still receiving too much coverage, and which are neglected, with regards to the overall demographics of the country.

35% of the children who appeared in broadcast footage were black, while 24% are white. The remaining 41% included Indian, Asian, Coloured and other ethnicities. “Other” in this case referred to Iraqi children, a general story on the finding of a United Nations report into child pornography and a story on Latino children in South America.

These figures are clearly not representative of South Africa’s demographics. According to the 2001 census, black children constitute 76% of the children’s population in South Africa, while white, Indian and coloured children constitute 14%, 2% and 8% respectively (Department of Home Affairs, Census 2001). A lack of representation of certain races serves as much to discriminate against these children, as does poor representation, as it makes these children invisible. It is essential to include stories on children from all races in order to affirm their place in South Africa’s democracy.

White children were accessed for most of their opinions (34%), while black child sources constituted just over 30%. This disparity may serve to affirm and empower white children while other children’s voices are not heard and receive a more narrow representation. It puts pay to the adage that journalists should give power to the powerless and a voice to the voiceless.

This was commented on by Minister in the Presidents office Essop Pahad in 2001 when he noted, “representivity does not just apply to editorships. It applies to all department ... some spheres are more ahead than others in achieving representivity. Some, which deal with the public, simply have to. But much more needs to be done” (Pahad, 2001).

An effort needs to be made on the part of e-News to access more black children and children from minority groups other than white for their opinions. As it is particularly these people who were denied a voice in South Africa’s past, it is important that they be given an opportunity to exercise their right to participation and express their opinions in matters that affect them.

4.7.1 How does e-News cover race issues involving children?

According to e-News staff (Interviews, 2004) racial issues concerning children do not form part of the day-to-day discourse at e, unless there is a report dealing specifically with a racial/racist incident. This means that race is not on the agenda. Instead cases involving racial incidents often only provide an account of event surrounding the incident with little or no discourse about human rights and discrimination.

In its draft Editorial Guidelines, e-News states the following:

Race or ethnicity should be noted only if it is relevant to the story. An example is in the case of a racially motivated attack. But a person’s race should be mentioned in routine crime stories only if it is necessary for identification purposes while police are still looking for the suspect. If a person has already been arrested for a crime, there is no reason to indicate the person’s racial or ethnic background.

The word “white”, “black” should not be used as nouns, but as adjectives: white people, black people etc.

There are also some South Africans who take exception to specific labels such as “coloured”, preferring a more generic term such as “black person”. A good rule of thumb in these situations is to ask how people describe themselves.

The phrase “ethnic group” should be used instead of “tribe” – a term that is associated with negative racial stereotyping (Nicklin, 2004).

The one example, which could be construed as racist on the part of e-News was the reporting on the disappearance of Leigh Matthews. At around same time Leigh went missing from the exclusive educational institution, Bond University in Sandton Johannesburg, little Rafiq Hardien went missing in Mitchell's Plain. E-News picked up on the story of Rafiq two weeks after it was first reported in the newspapers, yet the station broadcast the details of Matthews's disappearance nightly. Only after Rafiq's mother made a desperate plea for the return of her son did e-News start picking up on other missing children stories – all were either “black” or “coloured” children.

Head of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University Guy Berger makes this comment on it,

The cultural colours evoked by this story are not entirely race and ethnicity-free. That the innocent young woman is white and wealthy helps explain why articles and pictures made so many front pages and why they echoed in so many hearts... Thus she may be white, but she is the folk-tale African maiden fetching water at the river taken by crocodiles...Leigh Matthews is, in short, a reminder of the deep-seated ways we decode our world and a made-to-measure for the media to score audience resonance. To recognize this is not to denigrate our very human response to her situation. Instead, it is to understand the circumstances in which we let the media move us (Berger, 2004).

While this case was indeed a newsworthy incident, it was also about a beautiful and innocent young girl in grave danger from an unknown source. If Matthews had been the male child of a single parent would the coverage have been as extensive? Does gender play a role in the coverage of children on e-News?

4.8 Gender of the children on e-News

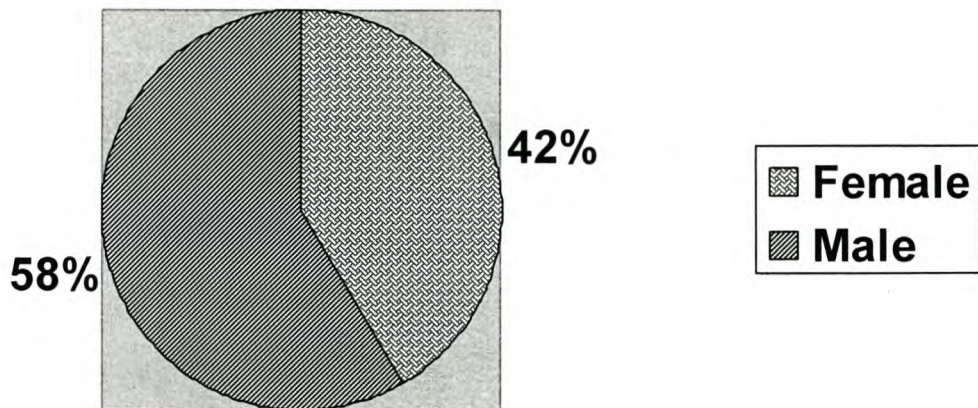
Children are socialized into particular roles from a young age and the representation of children and gender in the media communicates specific messages to children about the roles they should play in society. It is therefore important to establish how children are represented in terms of gender.

Age and gender differences are evident in portrayals of diverse racial-ethnic groups. In one study (Palmer, Smith & Strawser, 1993), African-Americans and European Americans were equally likely to be portrayed as children, whereas

Latinos were least likely to be played in these roles despite the actual younger median age of this group in the United States. Among all visible racial-ethnic groups, female characters were one third to one half as likely as male characters to be included” (Macbeth, 1996:68)

To determine the ratios on e-News, it is necessary to look at the sex of children in the media to determine whether there are patterns in the types of stories in which a particular sex appears, and then what this may communicate in terms of gender i.e. if the sex of a child is associated with specific roles or activities.

Graph 15. Male/Female ratios on e-News



It's clear from the above data that males (58%) receive more coverage than females (42%), although the disparity is not enormous. A closer look at the categories in which boy and girl children appear indicated that their representation is still along stereotypical lines (Refer to Graph 16). Girls are more likely to appear in stories on child abuse and rape, and boys more in terms on street-children and sports stories. Such a finding reinforces stereotypes of girls as passive victims and boys as active, assertive and street-wise heroes.

The results also indicated that boy and girl children are sourced (assessed for their opinions) fairly equitably, boys 53% and girls 47%. Overall the results revealed that where children's sex is identified in a story, male children are sourced more than female children in the majority of stories, while female children are sourced more in stories on child abuse, HIV/AIDS and human rights which include items on legalities as well as racism and gender issues.

It must be stressed that this does not mean to suggest that abuse against girl children (especially sexual abuse) should not be highlighted by the media, but it appears that there is an emphasis on girl children in cases of sexual abuse.

Not only then does the current representation of abuse in the media highlight the dramatic and extreme but it also appears to represent the patterns of abuse in South Africa along gender lines.

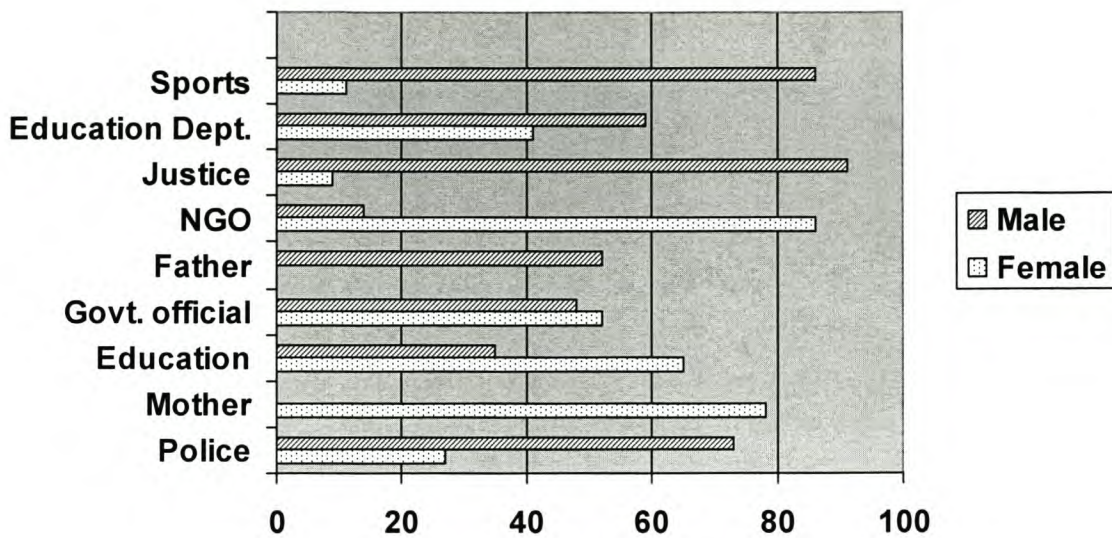
4.10 Gender of adults in e-News children's stories

The breakdown of adult sources appears at first glance to be better than the norm, 48% females and 52% males. The recent Gender Media Baseline Study highlighted the disparity in male and female sources with 81% male voices against 19% female voices (Gender Media Baseline Study, MISA, Gender Links MMP). An analysis of the roles of adult sources reveals that one of the most common sources in stories on children is the government department or an education official (61% female, 58% male).

Female sources are limited to more “feminine” roles such as mothers and members of the NGO sectors. Similarly men were limited to “masculine” roles of police and government officials. There is roughly an 80-20 split of males to females in all categories, except mother and NGO, including police (27% female, 73% male), justice (9% female, 91% male), government official (52%female, 48% male), sports (11% female, 86 % male) and education (41% female, 59% male). The most common source of comment was the “mother” in 78% of the stories, while fathers were sourced in 52% of stories (Refer to Graph 17).

These results support gender stereotypes where males are sourced more often and more broadly whereas the majority of female sources are limited to traditional “feminine” categories that are usually more nurturing. The narrow and limited roles in adults are sourced also limit children's perceptions of the roles they would assume as adults. Furthermore it may be that children would attribute characteristics about the roles men and women play in society through what is represented to them.

Graph 16. % Of adults sourced



From this we can conclude that those speaking on behalf of the children do not do so in a framework, which includes the human rights of children - children are represented by everyone but seldom by themselves. This does leave the child, in some instances, vulnerable to abuse by an adult speaking on his/her behalf. Generally the coverage of violations of children's rights has been scarce. Children's voices are muted. This violates the right of the child to freedom of expression, thought and conscience as advocated in articles 13 and 14 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. These articles recognize the child's right to hold his or her own opinion and freedom of expression.

Generally, this outcome proves that the media suppresses children's voices when covering children's rights issues. According to the InterMedia Survey Institute for UNICEF, "Dozens of examples of young people's participation in the media attest to their interest in the world around them, especially if given the chance to meaningfully express themselves on issues affecting them" (Gigli, 2004). The most successful participation programs are those that incorporate the ideas of "genuine and effective" participation i.e. overcoming cultural norms that children should be seen and not heard and getting adults to "let go".

4.11 The representation of children reinforces certain stereotypes

4.11.1 Language and the way it affects the way children are represented on e

Children, like women do not feature prominently on e-News unless they are victims. This reinforces the stereotypes that women and children occupy the lowest status in society which in turn shapes society's and the media's behaviour towards them. The language used when talking about children thus affects the way in which children are represented. Language can be used to convey respect to children, to empower them, or the language can serve to disempower them.

There is a great deal of stereotyping – children portrayed as powerless victims of abuse, conflict, crime and poverty; or children seen as charming and entertaining accessories to the adult world. Where children themselves have been asked about their views on media portrayal – anywhere in the world – invariably they object to this stereotyping, and want to know why the media so rarely treats them seriously as intelligent individuals who are quite capable of contributing to a debate (Jempson, 2003:2).

The relevance of this to e-News is that by giving a voice to children, in justifiable circumstances, the significance of a child as a human being with rights is emphasized. Whereas e-news rarely asks a child their opinion it is prudent to keep in mind that the child still has an immature value system and as such, the adult is expected to take the moral high ground. Even so there are circumstances in which a child's comment can offer fresh perspective, for example in the story of 10 years of democracy celebrations, 10 year old children were asked their opinions on the celebrations and it lent a poignancy to the story and where they would be ten years from now (Rice, 2004).

According to the MMP (UNICEF, 2004: 36). Below are some of the ways, in which language can affect the representation of a child:

1. **Structure of a story** – reports can be factual and event-based, or contain graphic details. If it is not structured within a human rights framework it becomes a “so-what” story. Often they are reactive rather than conveyors of information that could empower the public. For example, e-News carried a five-line story on the launch of Child Protection week. The entire story said was that CPW had started, but gave no reason as to why there is a need for this week at all.

2. **Statistical reporting** – reports seldom provide follow-ups and often report children as statistics without contextualizing the story. For example a story on e-News about the 2003/2004 crime statistics has one throwaway line: “Child abuse figures, however, continue to rise frighteningly, up 35 % a year” (Said, 2004). There is no contextualizing of the this figure, such as what last years figures were and even the year before that, nor the reasons as to why the figure as continued to rise.
3. **Language can objectify a child.** It can refer to a child as an inanimate object. This is often done when an object relating to a story (usually disasters/accidents or abuse) is used to describe the child. It is dehumanizing and constitutes a language of abuse as the child is further victimized when he/she is referred to in that way. The word “kid” is an example of how reference to a child can become too colloquial and the use of the words “headless body” or “sewer boy” (Mtembu, 2004) are undermining terms used to refer to children who are victims of crime and natural disasters.
4. **The emphasis in reports on children is often on the adult** (the emphasis is often on the man and not on the woman/girl). This suggests that children are not as important as adults and that their opinions are not important. For example, in a story about a priest accused of raping six girls, the story focuses on the chapel where it happened and what they community believes about the priest, but there is no mention of the girls in the piece. Did they receive medical treatment? Are they speaking with the police? Is this common in the area of Clocolan? Where are the girls now? (Henny, 2004)
5. **Sources are more often men** – this often reinforces and affirms a strong male bias while contributing to the marginalization of females especially with roles they occupy. This has been demonstrated above, except in the case of the “Mother”. For example, in the case of Leigh Matthews, it was the father who facilitated an open communication between e-News and police investigations. Interestingly, the mother seldom made a comment and kept a backroom distance from e-News.
6. **Language can be patronizing and disrespectful.** This serves to further victimize the child. Often news reports make use of the word “kid” to describe a child. It is colloquial and often offensive to children. The use of any diminutive to describe an individual can be perceived as disrespectful. An example on e-News occurred when a child was found sodomized and was referred to as “this kid required extensive surgery” (Mtembu, 2004). It also detracts from the empathy of the story.

7. **There are often contradictions** – children are seen as vulnerable and innocent, but in the case of gender differences, boys are seen as stronger and less fragile than girls. The language used when reporting on sexual issues can perpetuate gender stereotypes and further victimize girls.
8. **Language can reinforce the representation of a child as a victim** – by calling them victims directly, by representing them as statistics and by using language that objectifies, trivializes and fails to recognize their minor status. For example instead of saying a child is a “victim” of HIV/AIDS, it is preferable to say a child is “living” with HIV/AIDS.

4.12 How do visuals affect the way that children are represented?

1. **Footage of children in pain is powerful and it has strong emotional appeal.** The shots of Baby Chelsea, (Mthembu, 2004) for example, were taken on her level to allow viewers insight into what it must be like to be three years old living your life with screws in your back.
2. **Children are sometimes used gratuitously** – their innocence and vulnerability are used in images to reinforce certain messages, but at the same time it reinforces certain stereotypes of children. This happens in television when children are shot from a higher vantage point. They are made to look small and vulnerable. This technique is often used in stories about sick children or hospital stories – where often it is the only way to shoot a sick child. The image is heightened by white linen depicting innocence and purity.
3. **The way that visuals are used can reinforce stereotypes.** This is when in television little boys are filmed playing rugby and little girls are filmed on the swings or playing dolls.
4. **There is a clear contradiction here where children can be used so powerfully but they are often portrayed as powerless.** For example, there can be a political statement in an armed American soldier giving a sweet to a little Iraqi boy. Although, visual representations of children suffering do have a tendency to violate their rights to dignity and privacy. While the intention of using these pictures is to highlight the plight of children in sometimes life-threatening circumstances, it is important that journalists exercise caution, sensitivity and respect for the rights of people they wish to respect.

Chapter 5

Agenda-setting

Bernard Cohen claimed that the news “may not be successful in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling people what to think about” (1963: 13). “Agenda-setting” is one of the ways in which the mass media’s “effect” on the public has been understood. Whereas the theory is detailed more in Chapter 3 on Methodology, it suffices to say, “Agenda-setting is the idea that the news media, by their display of news, come to determine the issues the public thinks and talks about” (Severin & Tankard, 1988:264).

The agenda-setting hypothesis came about when researchers became dissatisfied with the dominant theoretical position in mass communications research in the 1950’s and 60’s – the limited effects model (Severin & Tankard, 1988:267). Researchers began to realize that news did not affect *attitude* change, as originally thought, but changed people’s *perceptions*. At the same time cognitive psychology was developing which saw people as ‘problem solvers’ rather than as objects of conditioning or manipulation. The two work hand-in-hand. It is also important to note that the whole approach of ‘effects’ is connected to behaviorial psychology, and that this psychological approach to the media has also come in for criticism.

McCombs and Weaver (as cited by Severin et al, 1988:280), state that agenda setting may not take place to the same extent and in the same way for all individuals. Individuals differ in their need for orientation and this may determine whether or not agenda setting takes place. For this reason relevance of information becomes important as does the degree of uncertainty concerning the message. The greater the uncertainty and the greater the relevance the greater the need for orientation. For example, most parents would find the disappearance of Leigh Matthews relevant because of their relationships with their own children. The uncertainty of what had happened to her meant that e-News had to orientate its viewers with consistent coverage as the case unraveled, up to and including her funeral.

The agenda-setting models are considered, by some, as too broad aiming to be applicable to all areas of public policy. Dissatisfaction with these models led the theoretical analysis and debate towards an examination of the characteristics of relationships between policy actors, government and institutions, in particular policy areas (Papadopoulos, 2002).

However it does explore the conceptual links between the theories of policy process and the conceptualization of what should determine a policy and for this reason it is being applied to the newsroom. The question is why do some news issues receive more attention than others and how do these issues enter the agenda?

Priming is the process by which the media attend to some issues and not others, and thereby alter the standards by which people evaluate the world around them (Severin & Tankard, 1988: 266).

This assignment does not encompass an audience survey to determine which issues they see as more important than others as a result of exposure to the media. Therefore, this assignment departs from the assumption that that this influence will take place. What will be investigated is the content is on the basis of what that influence will presumably exert.

E-News has the ability to increase awareness about children's issues within a human rights framework. Were it not for the media, the South African public would almost certainly not know about child abuse, children orphaned from HIV/AIDS, education for children, and health issues affecting children.

For example, few people would not be aware of the dangers of serial child rapists such as Fanwell Kumalo or paedophile James McNeil who dressed up as a Father Christmas for Red Cross Children's hospital patients (Rice, 2004); nor would they donate bone marrow samples without hearing the story of leukemia sufferer Lindy Anderson (Rice, 2004). Even though e-News was not the only media, which covered these stories, it is assumed that the visual impact has shifted the perceptions of the viewers.

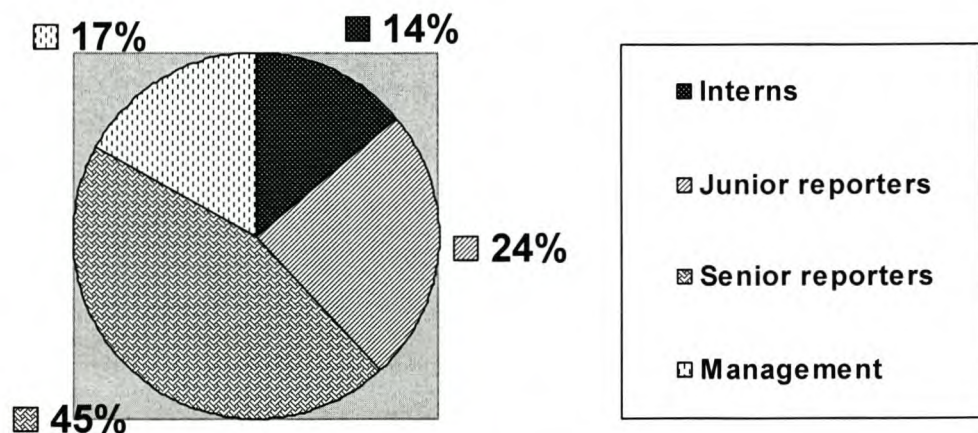
5.1 The Agenda-setting hypothesis and e-News

After the content analysis for e-News bulletins from January to August was completed, questionnaires were submitted to a broad spectrum of e-News employees. They included the Head of News, News Editors, Assignment Editors, Bulletin Producers, Writers and Interns. The aim was to determine how e newsroom employees make their decisions on how children's issues are covered, the amount of airtime they receive and what influences their decisions and why. Supplying their name was optional and only those who have done so have been quoted in this assignment.

5.1.1 'Joe Modisane' and e-News content

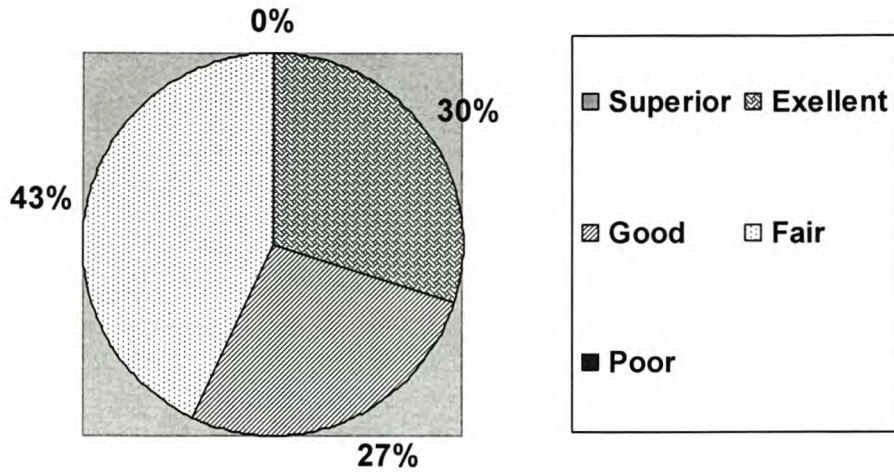
Just recently (October 2004) e-News management formatted a new strategy to determine the relevance of a story for e-News. Audience rating had been inconsistent and they showed that e-News was attempting to be “all things to all people” (Thloloe, 2004). This may be as a result of e-News being a free-to-air station, which is solely dependent on advertising revenue. For this reason the news department, in collaboration with the marketing department came up with a fictitious character called ‘Joe Modisane’. Joe has a tertiary education, is black, drives a golf but aspires to drive a BMW. He lives in Randburg but wants to live in Sandton. He may have a child or two. The reporters were asked to keep ‘Joe’ in mind and ask, “would this news story be relevant to Joe?” Whereas many journalists found this stereotyping of a black man in his 30’s offensive and superficial, others believe it to be an effective method of focus for the news.

Graph 17. How the sample was broken up



Of all the candidates interviewed, 43% of the journalists considered that news gave “fair” coverage of children’s issues (Refer to Graph 18). 27% thought it was “good” and 30% thought it was “excellent”. Interestingly it was mostly interns that felt the coverage was “fair” (14%). It was mostly management (31%) who felt it was excellent. No one felt that the e-news coverage was poor or that it was superior to that of other news organizations.

Graph 18. How does news staff view the coverage of children's issues?



5.2 Agenda

It is important to determine whether it is the interests of the public, which are determining e-News coverage of children's rights (Refer to Graph 18). However, in terms of what influences the choice of children's stories on e-News, the management was unanimous that the "public" (28%) and "personal influence" (35%) determines the coverage of children's issues. The reporters were more of the opinion that it was "other media" (23%) and "political parties" (14%) which often determine the type of news, which is being covered. The difference between the attitudes of management versus that of the journalists could be attributed to the fact that most of the managers have little journalistic experience and so their idea of what happens on the ground is often removed from the reality.

This limited opinion poll seems to suggest that personal influence and individual's personal feeling about what is "newsworthy" has a direct impact on the type of news, which is covered.

This was further emphasized when the respondents were asked to rate e-News coverage of child-related issues.

An important key to determining how and when e-News child-related stories are covered, it is important to consider the 'gatekeeper'. The concept of gatekeeper has been frequently used in functionalist media studies, particularly with reference to any action within a media organization, which involved choosing or rejecting some potential item for broadcast, in this

case. The concept originated in the work of Kurt Lewin (1947) dealing with decisions about household purchases. "He noted that information has always to flow along certain channels which contain 'gate areas', where decisions are made either according to impartial rules or personally by 'gate-keepers', as to whether information or goods will be allowed to enter in, or continue, in the channel" (McQuail & Windahl, 1981:100).

This is the person who first filters news from the public, public relations companies, government and NGO's through the reporters and onto the bulletin. At e-News it is Assignment's Editor Craig Urquhart. He believes the stations current coverage of child-related stories is 'excellent'. He does not believe a political agenda determines the stations coverage of news, but that "personal influences" could play a role in determining whether a story is covered or not, possibly "because I am a father" (Urquhart, 2004).

Most of the junior reporters and interns agreed. One intern, who wishes to remain anonymous, believes that there are not enough stories pertaining to children on the news, "because I rarely see stories like that on the news".

Executive Producer Chris Nicklin, said,

I am not struck by any consistent coverage of children's issues other than ad hoc stories relating to occasional child abuse, handouts from charity etc. In the past e-news was diligent in covering and exposing stories relating to child abuse (including sexual crimes), exploitation and non-adherence to their constitutional rights, while avoiding 'campaigning journalism'. I think it is accurate to say that stories about children were an identifiable characteristic of e-News. This is not to say that handling of the stories was always right. But there was an acknowledgement that children, while being a vulnerable group in society, represent the future and as such should be treated seriously as a news story and not convenient fodder. I would agree with this and refer to my earlier comments that despite conventional wisdom, parents and guardians are not necessarily the best spokespeople for their children, or for that matter, issues pertaining to children (Nicklin, 2004).

From the above it is safe to assume that the issues that these journalists determine to be important are not entirely the same issues noted in international studies, i.e. child-related stories are considered non newsworthy and children are perceived as being victims without rights or status (Mwanza, 2003:13; Nwankwo & Okwemba, 2002:4; MMP, 2004:72) given attention by

the general mass media. Even though most of those at e-News agree that their personal influences to be instrumental in the decision-making process, children are considered and expected to be placed in the e-News agenda.

5.3 Child-related issues and pseudo-events on e

A large percentage of child-related stories on e (69%) are what is termed “pseudo-events” (Severin & Tankard, 1988) i.e. marches about child abuse, protests outside the courts of child-abuse cases, the release of statistics pertaining to children. Much coverage is given to government initiatives such as anti-abuse campaigns, sexual awareness drives, reforms aimed at improving education etc. They are the events which either takes place on the street or in a press conference.

These stories do create awareness about children’s rights, but they are unobtrusive and lacking in immediacy. Judging from e-News content, e-News does portray non-newsworthy events in a newsworthy way i.e. journalists make an effort to individualize a story. For example when Women Against Child Abuse marched for children’s right, the e-News journalist followed the march through the eyes of one child and that child’s story, thus increasing its relevance to the viewer (Ismail, 2004).

However, if the information is not placed within a human rights framework, it restricts the information released to the public and strips it of any immediate relevance.

The stories, which fail to do this, are, as Nicklin explains, because e-News picks up on stories from other media and ends up “hunting with the pack in the belief that we’d look silly if we ignored it” (Nicklin, 2004).

By reporting on pseudo-events, the relevance of the story to the viewer lessens. Evidence shows that if a viewer can personally relate to the contents of a news story, the likelihood of a perception shift is increased.

5.4. e-News and relevance of child-related stories

With the agenda setting hypothesis two things are needed (Severin & Tankard, 1998: 267): the subject matter needs to be relevant to the viewer, and there needs to be a degree of uncertainty. The greater the relevance and the greater the uncertainty the more

the viewer needs to be oriented. This means that contextualizing of child-related stories becomes paramount.

Official crime statistics state that more than 6000 children are victims of statutory crime (Stats SA, 2004). This is a high figure, which affects roughly one in eight South Africans. Yet as research mentioned in chapter 2 of this assignment shows, only 6% of the coverage on e-News is about children.

Nicklin believes that “while we can’t report on each and every case, editorial managers and reporters are not concentrating their minds on how to cover a problem which seems endemic in our society. In other words, coverage is knee-jerk whenever there is a high profile case, but there’s no consistent coverage of the factors that contribute to this appalling situation or regular interrogation of what’s being done to counter the problem” (Nicklin, 2004)

Urquhart believes that enough coverage is given to children’s issues

It is our duty to tell the story extensively, but it is also our duty to sell news. If we overdose on this kind of coverage, we run the risk of chasing viewers away. That is the danger and that is why there needs to be a balance”.

He agrees that children’s stories do not make the news is because they are not newsworthy enough (Urquhart, 2004).

Bureau Chief, Andrew Barnes, also agrees that children’s issues do not make the news because they are just not newsworthy enough (i.e. unless the involve crime or tragedy). He agreed with Urquhart that stories about children stories are just not “sexy” enough to make them a marketable commodity. An intern disagrees and asks, “why is that an issue” (Barnes, 2004).

The less direct experience the public has with an issue, the more it will have to depend on the mass media for that information. Issues that affect the public directly, such as issues relating to children such as abuse, violence, education, health etc, are obtrusive. It therefore means that setting an agenda for an unobtrusive issue such as child rights may not be possible.

The challenge lies in giving more consistent coverage to children’s issues. Furthermore, whereas the agenda-setting theory hypothesizes that it changes the

perceptions not the attitudes of viewers, an opportunity exists for reporting to develop with a move away from unobtrusive stories to stories with a higher degree of relevance and unpredictability (uncertainty). For this to happen, reporters need to have a working knowledge of the rights of children so that stories can be contextualized and heighten the relevance. This requires creativity and a good knowledge of the e-News audience.

5.5 Criteria used to determine the relevance of a child-related story on e-News

Researchers Gladys Engel Lang and Kurt Lang suggest expanding agenda setting into agenda building, which can be broken down into six steps (Lang & Lang as cited by Severin & Tankard, 1988:278).

1. The media highlight an event or activity and make it stand out. E-News gives standard coverage to issues relating to children but in isolation these events lack relevance. The need for contextualization is paramount.
2. Different kinds of issues require different kinds and amounts of news coverage to gain attention. Child-related issues and their rights are not high-threshold issues. This means they do not require that much effort to bring them to public's attention. Yet at e, as will later become clear, there is an ad hoc approach to the way in which children's issues are covered.
3. The language used by the media can affect perception of the importance of an issue. By stating: "In other controversial news", before a children's story, sensationalizes it immediately and invalidates the message it is trying to send out. Referring to children in diminutive terms such as "little ones", "kids" and "babes" disempowers the child.
4. People need to have a basis for taking sides on an issue. There needs to be an angle. Journalists could interview and film a child. The journalists' credibility could be heightened if he/she treats the story with sensitivity, places it in context, and looks for an opportunity to tell the story in a different manner.
5. Agenda building is accelerated when well-known and credible individuals speak out on an issue. When 8-year old Nkosi Johnson went public with his HIV status he helped demystify the stigma of the virus. When Lindy Anderson spoke about

her leukemia (Rutter, 2000; Rice, 2004) it galvanized members of the public into donating bone marrow samples.

This six-point plan served as basis to determine how decision-makers at e determine whether a story is relevant.

Respondents were asked to choose one of the following child-related stories for the bulletin and to motivate why they chose that story. The stories are as following:

- A South African child sexually abused by his/her father
- An Iraqi child with blown off arms and legs
- A South African child who has won an international mini-Maths Olympiad
- A mentally disabled child who has won the mini-Maths Olympiad

The highest number of people who would choose the mentally disabled child who won the Mini-Maths Olympiad was mostly interns and junior reporters. Their reasons were mostly that it offered “an unusual angle”; “it’s an exceptional story”; “it’s not the typical negative child story”.

Traditional news values refer to a system of evaluating newsworthiness, which determine news content. This ethical system encourages debating and “airing differences over competing moral principles. In so doing, it crystallizes societies attitudes about ethical dilemmas and often leads to adjunction of disputes” (Day, 2000:24).

There are shared values among people, and particularly among journalists. Standards may be applied differently (as visible above) but the values are shared. There is a wisdom, which sets to strike a balance between the rights and interests of individuals and their obligations to society. There is a sense of justice, which has to do with people’s relations to each other and is often important in the resolution of conflict. Central to this is fairness. Then there is the value of freedom, which allows for freedom of choice. Finally there is the value of accountability. It encourages virtuous behavior and works hand-in-hand with freedom (Day, 2000:27-29)

The above questions the respondents value systems. The choices offered to the respondents encompass values of wisdom (the choice of story based on the individuals experience, personal preferences and societal framework), justice (this tests whether it would be fair to cover the story of a vulnerable child with little recourse or

comprehension of media consequence), fairness, freedom (living in an arguably uncensored society would this story form part of a political or personal agenda?) and accountability (are the respondents able to defend their choices, within framework of societal values?)

This relates to agenda setting by determining the decision-making process of the respondents to content, which in turn will decide what is placed on the agenda with regards to children and their rights.

Nicklin said that while not subscribing to sunshine journalism, this was the most interesting of the options. Urquhart agreed, saying that it was the most unusual of all the stories and offered a unique angle.

Those who opted for the abuse story (23%) did so for different reasons. Barnes said “Ratings! Ratings! Ratings”. The Iraqi boy story received a rating of only 12%; this could be because the subject is not South African or that there has been a barrage of such stories over the past year.

Lotter believed a South African child who has won the International mini Maths Olympiad should make the bulletin, because while it is positive, it does not have the ‘freakish’ and sensational aspect about it. She makes the point, “It’s South African and it’s good news. And it can serve the public interest – i.e. thousands of kids need Maths inspiration. The country needs scientific qualifications”.

It is interesting to note that only 8% of the respondents chose relevance to audience as a reason for choosing a story as a lead. This emphasizes the assumption that child-related stories are often chosen according to personal prejudices; and that they are chosen for their “sexiness”, “freakishness” and “unusual angles. These are not stories, which are drawn from a common among viewers.

The respondents were then asked to rate child-related topics in order of importance and relevance. 100% of the respondents believed that Child Abuse and Violence was the single most important topic to cover about children. HIV/AIDS was considered the second most important issue by 68 % of the respondents. The other 32% placed Child Labour in second place (interesting considering from the previous research that there was not one single story on Child Labour in the eight months of this assignment monitoring period). The fourth most important was discrimination, followed by

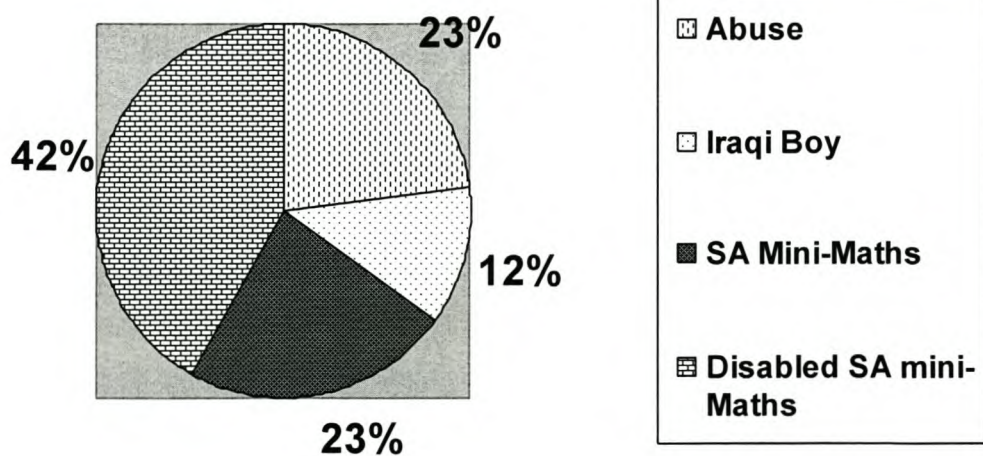
deprivation of health care and finally deprivation of education. Previous research shows that e-News has actually given high priority to education over the past year.

Respondents were asked on what basis they would make a decision to include a story in the bulletin. The categories were as follows:

- Relevance to audience.
- Shock value.
- Good footage.
- Every other media organization was covering it.
- Educational purposes.

In 98% of the cases management, senior reporters, junior reporters and interns agreed that relevance to the audience was the most important factor. Then a split occurred between management and staff. Management placed “shock value” as of secondary importance, while staff believed “good footage” should be the next consideration. ‘Education’ fell last on the list of priorities – largely because reporters are aware “we are a commercially driven station”. The fact that other media organizations are covering it was also not considered a factor by many of the respondents (4%) (Refer to Graph 20). There is selective reporting on e-News when it comes to children.

Graph 19. Hypothetical story choices



5.6. So who sets the e-News agenda with regards to child-related stories?

With regards to e-News it has been established through the above that the news does not reflect a 'reality'. Researcher Ray Funkhouser, looked at the relationship between public opinion and media content and the relationship between media content and reality. He found that media coverage does not correspond well with realities of the issues. His study suggests that the news media does not give a very accurate picture of what is going on in the nation (as cited by Severin & Tankard, 1988:269).

This has become clear in terms of the way in which e-News covers children's issues. If issues are not relevant to the population's common denominator, the talking points, "hot-topics" or pertinent issues are not reflected. This does not mean that they do not happen, but just that they are not reported on.

That is why this question becomes important in light of placing children's rights on the news agenda. Interestingly it was mostly women who felt that the portrayal of child-related issues is not representative of the general public. In fact, many alluded to a type of "schizophrenic" approach to the coverage of children's issues – an all-or-nothing scenario.

However, the newsroom employees were all aware of being instrumental in setting the topical agenda when it came to children's issues. Many made their decisions on whether to include child-related stories in the bulletin based on whether the public would be talking about it or whether it would be a "switch-off".

It has also been established that in reality journalists evaluate a situation by what they see happening in other media, particularly print. That is their yardstick.

So what will it take to ensure that children's rights receive consistent coverage in e-News?

Most of the respondents agreed that more training is needed in terms of how to approach children's stories, particularly with the Junior Reporters and Interns.

One News Editor, who wished to remain anonymous, stated "as a whole, I believe our reporters are well versed when it comes to children's rights, but they remain a challenge for junior reporters. This highlights the need for proper and on-going training" (Anonymous, 2004).

An intern, who wished to keep her name confidential, stated that she believes there should be more training because it is inconsistent, “If it’s a white kid that could sue, we know not to show the face, but we’re a little less worried if the person comes from a poor background. I think it depends on who the editor is that day” (Anonymous, 2004).

Another member of management admitted that whereas there are some reporters who understand the rights surrounding children, there are many who have no idea. While the training of journalists is important, the “gate-keepers” should also be sensitized to understanding the relevance of a child-related story. Instead of selecting a story on its “uniqueness”, it should be selected on its broad representivity, instead of homing in on the subject matter; journalists should be fleshing it out.

5.7 Who speaks for the children?

Essentially it should be the media, e-News that speaks for the children. The media is charged, in this human rights framework of changing perceptions and not attitudes. It is the responsibility of e-News to place children’s issues on the agenda so that viewers speak and think about them. The news is a national platform, which coming back to the original definition of agenda-setting, has the power to change perceptions (when issues are sufficiently oriented).

In the questionnaire respondents were asked to comment on previous research done by the Media Monitoring Project which indicates that children feel they are not given a voice through the media, but that “agents” (guardians, parents, social workers etc) speak on their behalf. The question was asked to determine whether respondents were aware of the rights of children to be heard and to speak for themselves. “Children stories would benefit, says Producer Rene Lotter, from lively interviewees, a reporter who knows the field and is passionate about it” (Lotter, 2004).

Bureau Chief, Andrew Barnes had this to say, “E-News is geared towards a commercial audience, as such, and we cater for our market. Until such time as advertisers are wanted to market to children directly, we will continue to vie children’s voices to these so-called agents” (Barnes, 2004).

Nicklin believes that whereas reporters will say they are familiar with editorial procedures when filming a story, the opposite has been found to be true, particularly when it comes to subtleties and context. Nickin says that when journalists have to receive

the consent of a parent who often does not understand the consequences of being on television, “I do not believe that the journalists are adequately equipped to make the appropriate judgment calls in these instances” (Nicklin, 2004).

As is the case with most of the respondents, the same pattern of telling child-related stories has persisted which means that they may be perceived by these journalists as being “just more of the same stuff”.

The respondents were asked who should be the source of child-related story in order of importance. 49% of the respondents placed an NGO representative or Social Worker as a primary source, followed by a parent or guardian (21%) and then the child itself (16%). Government officials were unanimously chosen to be the last port of call.

There was a recognition however that in the “real” world, stories originate from NGO’s. Nicklin believes all the above are relevant and potentially crucial news sources, but the credibility of all their information needs to be rigorously checked to be credible.

5.8 Conclusion

By applying the model of Lang and Lang to interviews with e-News, the following has become clear.

1. The respondents in general don’t believe e-news highlights an event or activity and make it stand out. E-News gives standard coverage to these issues but in isolation these events lack relevance. The need for contextualization is paramount. “E-News covers children’s issues in an ad hoc manner” (Nicklin, 2004).
2. Different kinds of issues require different kinds and amounts of news coverage to gain attention. Child-related issues and their rights are not high-threshold issues. This means they do not require that much effort to bring them to public’s attention. Generally in the case of negative stories (when a child is perceived as a victim, sick, orphaned or vulnerable) the story is given “obtrusive” status. This means that the story of the individual is personalized, for example the story of Lindy Anderson gave her a “face”, a “name” and above all a “voice” (Rice, “Lindy”, July 2004). This story received extensive coverage as her illness was diagnosed, charity drives were set up, her first chemotherapy treatment was

documented and finally her death was reported on. This type of extensive coverage may lead to the perception by respondents (30 %) that e-News's coverage of child-related stories in "good".

3. Viewers need to have a basis for taking sides on an issue. There needs to be an angle. Journalists could interview and film a child. The journalists' credibility could be heightened if he/she treats the story with sensitivity, places it in context, and looks for an opportunity to tell the story in a different manner. Respondents felt this was particularly necessary when reporting on Child Abuse stories. A viewer cannot be subjective about child abuse. 73% of respondents believed that the news is unbiased, "Without fear or favour", "when we report on these sensitive issues, we must make sure that the message gets across that this is a societal aberration" (Nicklin, 2004).
4. Agenda building is accelerated when well-known and credible individuals speak out on an issue. When 8-year old Nkosi Johnson went public with his HIV status he helped demystify the stigma of the virus. When Lindy Anderson spoke about her leukemia (Rutter, 2000; Rice, 2004) it galvanized members of the public into donating bone marrow samples.

These findings indicate that it is difficult to apply the Agenda-setting building block model to the e-Newsroom because of the wide range of the nature of a television newsroom (reactive, under-resourced, with a high percentage of inexperienced journalists)) cannot support an agenda-setting effect. The way in which children's rights are covered is ad hoc, i.e. as they present themselves. The issues have to vie for a place in a bulletin, which has strict time constraints, commercial considerations and is limited by the need for visuals to back-up the story

To fully understand whether an agenda has been set would require a response from the audience. It is recommendable that further research is done into audience response, through the use of focus groups. "It suggests that the process of putting an issue on the public's agenda takes time and goes through several stages. It suggests that the way the media frame an issue and the code words they use to describe it can have an impact and that the role of well-known individuals commenting on the issue can be an important one" (Severin & Tankard, 1988: 280).

Orientation needs to happen for something to be placed on the agenda. In the case of e-News it is clear that relevance to audience should be a high priority. By acknowledging the need for workshops and policies, reporters are indicating their need to establish guidelines with

regards to reporting on children. As one intern stated, the situation is currently defined by which editor is on duty which leads to this inconsistent style of reporting and whether a child's human rights are highlighted or not.

Chapter 6

Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

This assignment about “Children on e” used quantitative (percentages) and qualitative (questionnaires and interviews) methods to determine whether e-News reports on children within the parameters of the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child Act, which states “Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against discrimination or punishment on the basis of status, activities, expressed opinions or beliefs of the child’s parents, legal guardians or family members” (UN doc. A/44/49 Part 1. Article 2 (1989).

- While children account for close on 60% of the population, they receive little attention in local news stories (6%)
- When children were covered, HIV/AIDS received the highest coverage (30%), followed by violence and abuse (14%), Social Welfare (11%), Crime and Conflict (10%) and disasters and accidents (7%), child Labour (4%).

When children were portrayed in news it was almost split down the line between positive and negative stories. In these following two topics the number of positive stories outnumbered the number of negative angles. Social Welfare received the highest positive coverage at 68%, followed by HIV/AIDS at 53%. In Australia, for example, research done at the Australian Centre for Independent Journalism (1992) found that criminal activity accounted for a major portion of the media coverage on young people. A study in Portugal conducted by Cristina Ponte (2000) concluded that stories about children are almost always about something other than the child. And in Sweden a September 2001/2002 study indicated, “a great deal of stories was about youth and criminality”.

- When stories about children are covered, they carry high priority. In 90% of the cases they were carried in the first segment of the bulletin, but in 60% of the cases they did not conform to the CRC i.e. the stories did not encapsulate the human rights of children.
- In 21% of the stories children were portrayed as victims i.e. in one fifth of the stories, which included information about children. After that the “vulnerable child” was present

in 15.4% of stories and the “sick child” in 16% of stories. This indicates that children are perpetuated as a negative stereotype. The only “powerful” role was of the “child offender” who appeared in 8.5% of the stories.

- Adults spoke on behalf of children in only 26% of the stories, almost one third of the news items on e-News. Adults were given the chunk of the say at (58%). Of these in 78% of the stories, the “mother” was the source.
- Children of colour received a greater representation (35%) than white children (24%), but this is still out of balance with national demographics. Asian children were completely marginalized.

In general, the stories carried on e-news were passive rather than reactive. According to the agenda-setting formulation, children’s rights are covered in an unobtrusive rather than obtrusive way, which means that it is difficult to establish an agenda for them. Given the above evidence e-news could be accused of discrimination through its silence and neglect of child-related issues. The high percentage of children sourced as victims, orphans or as sickly invalidates the child and enforces the perception that the child has no societal standing and status. It strips him/her of their rights and disempowers the child because his/her voice goes unheard. As the agenda-setting formula proposes: the more airtime e-news gives to children’s rights, the more the public will perceive them as important.

However revealed in Chapter 5, journalists consider children non-newsworthy unless there is a unique or dramatic angle to their story. As Bureau Chief Andrew Barnes commented, “It is all about ratings, ratings, ratings”. Through the use of the agenda-setting formulation it was possible to determine that more stories on children’s rights are not covered in the news because they are not considered newsworthy. As Assignment’s Editor Craig Urquart states, “If we overdose on this kind of coverage, we run the risk of chasing viewers away”. The newsroom perception is those children’s rights issues are over-reported and would facilitate a viewer “switch-off”. Because of this they are being filtered through the newsroom “in box” largely because of personal agenda’s and decisions on whether to use or not use the story are largely determined, somewhat unsystematically, by personal influence (35%).

6.2 Recommendations

In light of the above evidence it is clear that children are not high on the E-news agenda. It also mainly carries issues about children, which are sourced from adults. The news is charged with changing the way children are perceived and handled by society and should therefore influence the provision and protection of children's rights.

If a human rights framework is taken as normative, e-news needs to adopt a consistent approach to the reporting of children's rights. 1) It should highlight an event or issue related to a child and place it within a human rights context, 2) there needs to be recognition that different issues require different types of coverage, 3) Language used in the reporting of children's issues is paramount to how the child is perceived, 4) stories should take a stand. This would impart credibility to the subject matter – the child, 5) credible individuals should be sourced to speak out on certain issues.

The challenge for those involved in child welfare and child protection is to make greater efforts to understand media influences and to use the media constructively. While a “partnership of equals” with some sections of the media may be impossible, a more active partnership is essential if the complexities of child abuse and child protection are to be responsibly debated and appropriate goals are set (Goddard and Liddell, 1995:362-363).

The International Federation of Journalists (IJF) in its proposed amendment to the draft of the Congress, called for action to “encourage media professionals to develop strategies which strengthen the role of media in providing information of the highest quality, reliability and ethical standards concerning all aspects of the exploitation of children” (IFJ, 1996).

The following recommendations are resigned to strengthen the key role of the journalists in revealing instances of abuse and also in monitoring the performance of national and international bodies, both in honouring their commitments and working to end the commercial exploitation of children. These duties are given from a human rights framework, which is taken as normative, i.e. human rights are the criteria against which the media's responsibilities are measured.

There are some simple, but practical points to keep in mind here. The media can, without doubt, influence the decision-makers. But to do this effectively, media professionals must choose how and when. For broadcasters, for example, time is critical. First, the reporter needs enough airtime to present the subject properly. Second, the story must be broadcast at a time when the people who ought to see it will see it. Finally a sense of social timing is essential. Just as some

entertainment shows will sell one year and not the next, so too with news stories; audiences are not static in their responsiveness to social issues.

If children's exploitation is to be given the priority it demands, it must be highlighted in all media, particularly those, which reach opinion formers and people taking decisions. This is an issue, which touches on economy, society, education, development and the environment, and it is one occasion when editors must strive to present material that not only captures the imagination but also prompts actions.

6.1. Recommendations for further action

1. Training for journalists

- Ethical questions should have a higher profile in journalists' training, particularly with regard to standards of conduct in reporting issues, which are child-related.

2. Codes of Conduct and Self Regulation

- While codes of conduct and guidelines are useful in demonstrating that something needs to be done, they need to be enforceable and they need to carry the weight of responsibility. Such codes are weapons in the hands of journalists and campaigners who can use them to take up issues with editors, publishers and broadcasters.
- Specific guidelines on reporting crimes against children should be drawn up by professional associations to accompany or be included in their general ethical codes.
- Further study in this area is highly recommended.

3. Media Organizations and Media Professionals

- Journalists and programme-makers have a duty to increase public awareness of the dangers that children are exposed to. However reporting needs to be carried out with enormous care.
- Journalists and programme-makers should adhere to the highest standards of professional conduct when confronted with dilemmas such as professional secrecy, the use of subterfuge and the identification of victims in the course of their duties.

- They should avoid or challenge myths and stereotypes, which surround children and particularly children from rural areas, orphans and street children (all of whom have little or no recourse). For instance the myth that it is only poor, black children who are susceptible to HIV/AIDS, or that showing close-up of a child's face in pain may elicit sympathy from the audience and therefore bring about social change.
- Media professionals should recognize that freedom of expression must go hand in hand with other fundamental human rights, including freedom from exploitation and intimidation. They should give careful consideration to the facts when weighing up the relative merits of the different claims, and not allow themselves to be swayed by commercial or political considerations
- Journalists should never publish details which help exploiters find their victims, or which undermine the safety of child victims. Journalists should take particular care not to reveal information, which could lead to the collapse of criminal proceedings against exploiters.
- Journalist and programme-makers should look for innovative ways to respect the dignity of child victims, and avoid identifying them while at the same time telling their stories in a compelling and newsworthy way. For instance, by consulting them on content or showing ways in which they can escape from their situation. They should try focusing attention not only on the victims of exploitation but also on the perpetrators.

4. The need for Newsroom debate

- A constructive and supportive debate should be encouraged between media professionals about how this issue should be investigated and reported
- E-News should consider appointing 'children's correspondents', with responsibility for covering all aspects of children's lives. Special training to help journalists to express children's points of view. This might include child growth and development, child abuse, risk factors, children's sexual terminology, the law, interviewing techniques, communication with children etc.

- New means of giving children access to the media, as ‘sources’ or commentators, should be investigated. Children should know that information or opinions offered in confidence would be protected as such.

5. *The Role of Management*

Media editors and managers should implement – from the top down – a policy, which makes clear their opposition to biased and sensationalist coverage of the commercial sexual exploitation of children, and their support for high ethical standards among journalists and programme-makers. This could be done through the elaboration, in consultation with media professionals, of ethical guidelines on this and other issues, which should be seriously implemented and monitored.

6. *Government and NGO’s*

- Governments of NGO’s should support efforts by media organizations and journalists’ associations to raise awareness. In this regard, good practice videos for editors and journalists would be useful.
- In particular, support should be given to national women’s media associations, many of which are taking up the issue of media coverage of violence and violations of the rights of children.
- National NGO’s should consider compiling a directory of reliable experts on child-related issues to be distributed to the media. Such information could also be accessible on computer data banks.

7. *Children and the Community*

- Children from primary school upward should undergo media literacy training to help them understand and decode the messages they receive, so as to become critical and well-informed media consumers.
- The public should recognize and use their power, as audiences and consumers, to affect media policy, for instance through lobbying and consumer boycotts.

Finally, the media’s influence on child abuse and child protection may change but is unlikely to diminish. It is therefore paramount to encapsulate sound policies surrounding the coverage of children and their human rights issues. They are the future.

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